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The prose-poetry of James Agee: Samuel Barber's response

Dressler, Jane Kathleen, D.M.A.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1989

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THE PROSE-POETRY OF JAMES AGEE: SAMUEL BARBER'S RESPONSE

by

Jane Kathleen Dressler

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Music Arts

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Approved by


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APPROVAL PAGE

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DRESSLER, JANE KATHLEEN, D.M.A. The Prose-Poetry of James Agee: Samuel Barber's Response. (1989) Directed by Dr. William W. McIver and Dr. Eddie C. Bass. 115 pp.

Samuel Barber composed Knoxville: Summer of 1915 in 1947 as a commissioned work for Eleanor Steber, who premiered the work with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, April 9, 1948, Serge Koussevitzky conducting. The text, taken from James Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," a prose-poem which first appeared in PARTISAN REVIEW, August-September, 1938, is notable for its use of poetic devices within prose form.

The purpose of the study was twofold: to analyze the prose-poetry of Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" and to explore its influence on Barber's musical setting in the areas of formal structure and melodic design. Agee's concept of "Word Music" was defined, as were standard poetic devices used in the prose-poem. Particular attention was paid to word repetition, the punctuation it necessitated, and the poet's use of distinctive one-syllable words.

Musical analysis included the examination of the large-scale musical structure of Knoxville as correspondence between text and music as well as of Barber's melodic response to the standard poetic devices of sound and implied meter within Agee's text. Examples of each were studied for the composer's use of standard compositional means of emphasis--agogic, dynamic, metric, and rhythmic accent. In a final chapter, critics' reactions to Barber's composition were assessed as a means of measuring the effectiveness of Barber's creative response to Agee's prose-poem. Barber's use of specific means of compositional emphasis indicated the composer was highly

sensitive to Agee's use of poetic devices within the prose-poem, and felt the textual rhythms that move in the work as a whole.

Examination of twenty-four musical examples showed frequent use of agogic, metric, and rhythmic accent. Pitch accent was discovered in four examples from the second section only of the work. Dynamic accent was used four times for specific expressive effects.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

"But it is of these evenings, I speak."

Samuel Barber composed Knoxville: Summer of 1915 in 1947 as a commissioned work for Eleanor Steber. Dedicated to the memory of his father, Barber's work was premiered by Miss Steber with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, April 9, 1948, Serge Koussevitzky conducting. The text is drawn from James Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," a prose-poem which was first published in Partisan Review, August-September, 1938. The Agee text, an autobiographical, nostalgic sketch of many remembered summer evenings, is notable for its use of poetic devices within prose form.

James Agee (1909-1955) and Samuel Barber (1910-1981) represent two different approaches to the problem of self-expression in twentieth-century artistic idioms. Agee was perpetually experimenting within the limits of the English language,¹ while Barber, a "Neo-Romantic" composer,² chose to compose in a tonal framework during an era marked by arresting innovations and new complexities of composition. The two present opposing solutions to the ageless

¹Alfred T. Barson, A Way of Seeing (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1972), 33.

²Don A. Hennessee, Samuel Barber: A Bio-Bibliography (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 9.

difficulties of a poet or a composer working within a creative framework. Yet somehow, Agee's text and Barber's music, different as they seem, are successfully interwoven in the strikingly unusual composition, Knoxville: Summer of 1915. Samuel Barber's creative response to Agee's prose-poem captures the essence of Agee's beautiful text and skillfully enhances its effects by establishing a musical atmosphere which complements the nostalgia of Agee's prose-poem. For these reasons, Barber's work merits extended study such as this.

A brief overview of the lives of Agee and Barber provides a useful starting point for studying their creative output. Conveniently, Agee himself identified the major features of his life and achievement in a short autobiographical sketch later published in a popular U.S. magazine:

Mr. Agee, James 'Rufus' Agee, was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in November, 1910, scarcely one hundred years after the birth of Abraham Lincoln to parents verging on the bourgeois, but honest. . . .

At Harvard he made valuable contacts and spent what must always seem to him the four happiest years of his life. . . .

Originally purposing to be an Eagle Scout, a naturalist, a concert pianist, a master criminal or a movie director, Mr. Agee has interested himself in writing only during the past seventeen years. . . .

He has published two volumes, one of verse, one of prose, both literary bonanzas of their day.³

These four sentences reveal a great deal about James Agee. While the facts are roughly correct, his self-deprecating humor and the general tone of his brief description tell even more about the writer.

³James Agee, "James Agee by Himself," Esquire (December 1963): 149.

Agee was born to a family which, though not wealthy, could be said to be "cultivated."⁴ In "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," Agee recalls the pleasant summer evenings he spent there with his family before the death of his father in an automobile accident in May, 1916. The family tragedy became the impetus for Agee's most enduring and least complete work, A Death in the Family, published posthumously in 1957. Agee was educated at the respected institutions of St. Andrew's School in Sewanee, Tennessee, Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, and Harvard University in Massachusetts. His four years at Harvard University were important to the young Agee. Here he was exposed to literary ideas so compelling they would influence his writing for the rest of his life.⁵ A complex, driven personality,⁶ Agee dreamed and lived on a wider scale than most. He was a natural musician and avid music-lover, but as a child he told one of his relatives, pianist Paula Tyler, a New York conservatory graduate,⁷ "I think [music's] not hard enough for me. I want to do the writing."⁸ Besides spending 1932-1935 on the editorial staff of Fortune magazine, and 1939-1948 writing for Time magazine, Agee wrote film criticism for

⁴James Agee: A Portrait, excerpts read by Father Flye, cassette 52042 (2c), Caedmon, 1971, side four.

⁵Barson, Way of Seeing, 33.

⁶Ross Spears and Jude Cassidy, Agee: His Life Remembered (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985), 50.

⁷Mark A. Doty, Tell Me Who I Am (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1981), 1.

⁸Spears and Cassidy, Agee: His Life Remembered, 18.

The Nation, Partisan Review, Harper's, and the Forum.⁹ During his later years, Agee worked as a screenwriter in Hollywood, completing important projects such as the screenplay adaptation of "The African Queen" for director John Huston.¹⁰ Agee's dating of his interest in writing as "the past seventeen years" covers the period 1925-1942, and suggests his interest in writing began during his St. Andrew's School years.¹¹ Writing was his livelihood through the various media of poetry, prose, film reviews, and filmscripts.¹² The two volumes Agee mentions in his autobiographical comments were not successful during his lifetime, but have helped secure his position among critics as a literary innovator.

Permit Me Voyage, Agee's volume of poems, appeared in 1934, as that year's selection for the Yale Series of Younger Poets.¹³

J. Douglas Perry makes a strong case for the value of Agee's training as a poet while studying literature and writing at Harvard:

Agee's first lessons in style came from writing poetry, just as so many other good American prose writers did. . . .

To see Agee's formal schooling for what it is, it is necessary to see his poetry, both within and beyond Permit Me Voyage, as one long string of experiments in technique, all closely interrelated, all irresistibly pointing the way to his prose. . . .

⁹The New York Times, 18 May 1955.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹James Agee: A Portrait, side four.

¹²Richard R. Schramm, "James Agee (1909-1955)," Fifty Southern Writers Since 1900 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 9.

¹³J. Douglas Perry, "James Agee and the Southern Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1968), 10.

His serious efforts in poetry went well beyond 1934. . . . Agee's continuing respect for his poetry provides, I think, insights into his novel and novella.¹⁴

The volume of prose Agee mentions in his autobiographical sketch is the extraordinary Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, a collaborative effort resulting from an assignment Agee drew while working for Fortune. As a member of the Fortune staff, Agee was assigned various articles to write, many on unlikely topics. After four years with the magazine,¹⁵ the young writer was sent to study rural poverty in the South and was allowed to take along the gifted photographer Walker Evans to help prepare a complete written and visual record of the desolate conditions of the Alabama cotton sharecroppers, Southern unions, and New Deal programs.¹⁶ The resultant outpouring of prose and pictures went far beyond the proposed Fortune assignment, and eventually was published as a book. The work appeared in 1941 during an interlude when Americans were nearly totally preoccupied with events of the growing World War. Agee's book, unconventional both in presentation and content, was "proclaimed a failure."¹⁷

The wry tone Agee uses to describe his literary efforts reflects his frustration as well as his humor. Other more objective biographers are kinder in their estimate of Agee's contribution to

¹⁴Ibid., 13-15.

¹⁵Schramm, "James Agee," 10-11.

¹⁶Barson, Way of Seeing, 2.

¹⁷Schramm, "James Agee," 9.

twentieth-century American writing; and, of course, in the decades since his death, critics have been able to evaluate Agee's literary contributions from a better perspective.

When he composed "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," Agee was still a young writer under the influence of his college poetry courses. Techniques and approaches that experience would eventually soften still stand out in this early work. Chapter II identifies and analyzes specific poetic devices Agee employed within the prose framework of this composition in an experiment designed to achieve more powerful literary effects than prose alone might yield. His extreme sensitivity to both the sound and sense of words¹⁸ led Agee to the concept he called "Word Music" in the 1930s. By this term, the writer meant a type of poetic diction uniquely suited to his interests.¹⁹ Like many, or even most creative writers, Agee spent considerable effort struggling to use language in highly efficient ways. The critic Kenneth Seib describes this struggle clearly:

Words, inadequate tools to begin with, are further limited by poetic form, meter, and rhyme. Agee abandoned poetry not because of his inability, but because of poetry's inability to do what he wanted it to do. Confined by the limitations of the poetic line and its accoutrements of meter, rhyme, and form, Agee turned from poetry to modes of expression more suited to his vision. His entire career, in fact, seems a search for a manner of expression that would best enable him to see his artistic creation as a living reality in the present moment.²⁰

¹⁸See Louis Untermeyer's discussion of words' "sound" and "sense" in his famous study, Poetry: Its Appreciation (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1934), 456-477.

¹⁹Cathy Henderson to Jane K. Mathew, 20 June, 1988.

²⁰Kenneth Seib, James Agee (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), 38-39.

Agee believed expressive writing could result from word choice based upon the phonetic perception as well as the intellectual perception of words; this conviction led to the choice of words whose sounds he judged to complement their meanings. Agee also experimented with repetition of words, phrases and clauses, testing the notion that repeating sounds in certain patterns creates not only specific intellectual emphasis, but also distinctive and meaningful word rhythm. Agee often interrupted poetic-prosaic word rhythms created through repetition and other means, with monosyllables. In addition to their value as interrupters, these monosyllables created contrasting textual rhythm which enriched the overall texture of the composition.

Following a review of additional biographical material concerning the writing of "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," the process Agee used in his experiment to combine the worlds of poetry and prose is detailed. Discussion of aspects of the text includes consideration of the following:

1. Definition of appropriate standard poetic devices of sound and of meaning (which become Agee's "Word Music") and exemplification of each from the "Knoxville" prose-poem.

2. Examination of two aspects of Agee's use of poetic structure in prose:

- a. the device of repetition, either repetition of word, phrase, construction, or clause, and the punctuation Agee selected for the use of this poetic device

- b. Agee's choice of one-syllable words for expressive effect.

Samuel Barber, like Agee, conveniently summed up the major outlines of his life in an autobiographical commentary. Barber's "On

Waiting for a Libretto," includes thoughts on his interest in song and singing:

For almost twenty-five years I have had a calm, often happy--in any case anonymous--existence composing symphonies, concerti, sonatas, and songs. . . .

. . . I began composing at seven and never stopped. . . .

. . . I was about seventeen and deep in the study of composition, piano and even singing at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Yes, I had thought I should like to become a singer--a good way to earn a living while devoting myself to my first love, composing. But soon I found out that in order to be a great singer (and it is amusing only to be a great one) one must be either very intelligent or very stupid. It seemed to me I was neither. . . .

. . . interested as I have always been in any poetic texture I have set to music (Joyce, Hopkins, Yeats, Agee), I could immediately understand and appreciate the economy of . . . use of words. . . .²¹

Although these lines lack the range and diversity of tone of Agee's little sketch, they are useful in suggesting the importance of texts to the composer and of Barber's devotion to his art. Samuel Barber was luckier than James Agee in enjoying favorable professional recognition and popular success during his lifetime. Don A. Hennessee, in his excellent study, Samuel Barber: A Bio-Bibliography, points out that:

. . . Along with George Gershwin and Aaron Copland, Barber was one of the three most recorded and performed composers of the twentieth century. . . . almost all of his works were introduced by major performers of their time--Leontyne Price, Eleanor Steber, John Browning, Arturo Toscanini, Serge Koussevitzky, and Bruno Walter. . . . Barber was possibly the only American composer of the twentieth century who was able to earn his living entirely by composing; he did not need to teach or lecture.²²

²¹Samuel Barber, "On Waiting for a Libretto," Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), 166-169.

²²Hennessee, Bio-Bibliography, 3.

Barber was from a highly cultured family and, like Agee, enjoyed the benefits of an education from an exclusive school, The Curtis Institute of Philadelphia, where Barber was a charter student.²³ A number of Barber's early works were songs, including the Opus 2, Songs (1927-1928), settings of texts by A.E. Houseman and James Stephens, and Dover Beach (1931), words by Matthew Arnold.²⁴ As a mature composer, Barber composed steadily throughout his lifetime, winning the Bearns Prize, the Prix de Rome, a Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship, and numerous commissions.²⁵ After World War II, Barber entered a period of great personal productivity.²⁶ His ballet Medea was commissioned by Martha Graham and premiered in 1946, the Knoxville setting was written and performed in 1948, and the first performance of the Piano Sonata was played by Vladimir Horowitz in 1950.²⁷ Eventually, Barber turned to the genre of opera, writing the Pulitzer Prize-winning Vanessa (1958) with libretto by Gian-Carlo Menotti, A Hand of Bridge (1959), and Anthony and Cleopatra (1966).²⁸

Hennessee views Barber's style as being marked by "romantic lyricism" throughout his career as a composer.²⁹ Broder, an early

²³Ibid., 4.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 4-6

²⁶Ibid., 7.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 8-10.

²⁹Ibid., 12.

commentator on Barber's style, emphasizes the lyricism of Barber's work, but also suggests some stylistic development:

Traditional procedures are characteristic of all of Barber's music up to about 1939. After that time, however, they begin to be mingled with, or replaced by, methods that can only have arisen in the musical climate of our time. . . .

In the later music, the lyric type of line tends to become more chromatic . . .

The harmonic texture grows more dissonant; and while most of the works are still based on a tonal center, devices new to Barber's music are introduced.³⁰

Although Barber's compositional style changed, he generally wrote within certain well-defined limits of classical music. Barber did not reject the limitations of traditional composition in music as Agee had in his experimentation with poetic devices in his prose.³¹ Barber worked within a traditional format instead of following the more radical efforts of other twentieth-century composers. Additionally, his interest in song led him to explore texts of the best quality. American composer William Schuman, Barber's colleague, suggests:

Samuel Barber had cultivated tastes in everything--music, literature, food, dress, environment, and it would be inconceivable to imagine that he would choose any words except those on a very high level, but don't forget that in addition to the three you mention as examples [in letter from John Hartley Fahey], Joyce, Yeats, and Graves, he also set Kierkegaard (a pre-Romantic?), as well as Agee and others. I do not believe that anyone will be able to tell you why Barber favored the texts he chose. My hunch is that there was no conscious criterion at work, except quality.³²

³⁰Nathan Broder, "The Music of Samuel Barber," Musical Quarterly xxxiv (1948): 325-327.

³¹Barson, Way of Seeing, 51.

³²John Hartley Fahey, "Samuel Barber: A Portrait in Poetic Voice" (M.A. thesis, California State University Fullerton, 1983), 81.

Barber had been setting texts for twenty years when he became interested in Agee's "Knoxville," and his realization of the Agee text is clearly the response of an experienced composer. In Chapter III, discussion of Knoxville addresses briefly the musical considerations of length, vocal range and tessitura, and Barber's piano reduction of the score. Commentary referring to diagrams in Chapter III describes the form, harmonic language, motivic organization, and texture of Knoxville. This study then pursues two important areas of Barber's treatment of the Agee text. First, several aspects of Barber's structural response are discussed:

1. Barber's editing of the Agee prose-poem with the resultant effect upon the form of Knoxville
2. Barber's treatment of selected instances of the poetic structural devices mentioned earlier in this study (repetition of word, phrase, construction, or clause, and the expressive use of one-syllable words)
3. Barber's treatment of Agee's punctuation necessitated by Agee's word repetition

The second major division of this analysis focuses on aspects of Barber's melodic response to Agee's text, including:

1. Barber's treatment of Agee's use of poetic devices of sound
2. Barber's treatment of examples of the implied word rhythms within Agee's text

This approach allows analysis of the Agee text from two different perspectives--the prose-poem as a purely literary endeavor (Chapter II) and the prose-poem as a song text (Chapter III). Careful study of the words apart from the music focuses attention upon Barber's response to Agee's innovations.

One of the most interesting aspects of Barber's Knoxville is the chronology of its composition. Various sources give different accounts of this chronology. Most simply state the work was commissioned and performed by Eleanor Steber in 1948, but two highly-regarded musicologists give varying accounts worthy of consideration. The first comment appeared not long after the early performances of Barber's Knoxville:

Barber had read James Agee's long prose poem in The Partisan Reader (a collection of articles, stories, and other excerpts from The Partisan Review) when he was casting about for a subject for a work for voice and orchestra, commissioned by Eleanor Steber. At that time his father's illness was approaching its inevitable end and Barber was deeply moved by Agee's tender summoning up of the thoughts and feelings of a child lying in the grass of the back yard on a summer evening surrounded by his loved ones.³³

The special appeal of Agee's text to Samuel Barber is corroborated by remarks contained in a letter from Peter Mennin, former president of the Juilliard School: "I can comment first hand on the text for Knoxville: Summer of 1915 (prose by James Agee). Sam told me that the text reflected closely his own childhood."³⁴

Steven Ledbetter, researcher for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, has done considerable work with the Koussevitzky Music Foundation at the Library of Congress. Koussevitzky was committed to the performance of new works while he served as conductor for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Ledbetter's research with the Koussevitzky materials has prompted him to write the following:

³³Nathan Broder, Samuel Barber (New York: G. Schirmer, 1954), 62-63.

³⁴Fahey, "Portrait in Poetic Voice", 87.

Koussevitzky's next Barber premiere was also his last--and arguably the finest score that Samuel Barber ever wrote. The first hint of the work comes in a telegram from Barber to the conductor on 9 April 1947:

HAVE COMPLETED WORK FOR SOPRANO AND ORCHESTRA AND WOULD LOVE TO PLAY IT FOR YOU FROM PIANO SCORE THIS WEEK IF YOU EVER HAVE A MOMENT PLEASE WIRE ME AT CAPRICORN MT KISCO IF POSSIBLE FOR YOU AFFECTIONATE GREETINGS SAM BARBER

Koussevitzky was delighted with his first encounter with the piece. He apparently suggested Barber approach Eleanor Steber for the premiere, with the idea that if she liked the work, she would commission it (though, of course, it was by this time completed). Two weeks later Barber wrote to Koussevitzky:

Eleanor Steber is happy to commission "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" and I am glad, for I think she is the best possible choice. Of course, we can count on you to give the first performance!³⁵

It is important to note that three manuscripts of Knoxville exist:

The manuscript pages show three different versions of this important and popular work. One is a pencilled score for voice and orchestra, dated April 4, 1947: a second version, also pencilled, is for voice and piano and bears the same date: the third version, again in pencil, is for voice and small orchestra. The last-mentioned manuscript is incomplete, lacking approximately the first half, but this makes it no less welcome. The three versions together form a highly significant unit in the output of one of America's major composers.³⁶

Waters' description suggests that Barber responded immediately to Agee's text. The first question of chronology, i.e., "which came first, the work or the commissioning of the work?," is answered by Ledbetter's research, which capitalizes on the accessibility of the Koussevitzky archives, a source not available until 1978.

³⁵Program notes for Samuel Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915 (Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston), 18 August, 1984, 49-50.

³⁶Edward N. Waters, "Music," Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions, 15 (November 1957): 15.

No exact answer to the question of the date of Barber's first reading of the text can be determined at this time. However, the existence of three manuscripts, two of which are dated April 4, 1947, points to the composer's swift reaction to the original version of the Agee poem. The third citation also provides a glimpse of Barber's compositional method at that time.

As will be seen in detail in Chapter II, Agee's concentration on word choice resulted from his general intention to write with maximum expressiveness. While much can be said about Agee's motivations, and the degree to which he achieved his literary goals, an exhaustive critical analysis of Agee's writing is not the goal of this study. Instead, specific devices within the portion of a single prose-poem, "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" will be studied, that portion being the part Samuel Barber selected to set to music. As the present study will suggest, Barber seems to have been drawn to this particular portion of Agee's text because the poetic techniques which predominate in it have musical equivalents in Barber's score.

Many considerations of Barber's compositional style are worthy of discussion. By focusing on Barber's editing of the Agee sketch, and on several aspects of Barber's melodic response to Agee's "Word Music," two areas are opened for discussion--Agee's textual influence on the form of Barber's composition and Agee's textual influence upon specific examples of Barber's melodic writing. Because Agee's prose-poem "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" reflects the writer's interest in "Word Music," a poetic diction he adapted to prose, it is now

appropriate to examine Agee's background in poetry and his early interest in new forms of literary expression.

CHAPTER II

TEXT

Agee's own words about his life suggest the importance of his student years at Harvard, 1928-32. Among the most significant of his experiences there were the poetry classes of I.A. Richards offered in the spring of 1931. According to Alfred Barson:

Richards gave two courses at Harvard, both of which Agee attended Specifically, Agee was hard put to define what had taken place; but by comparing their writings at the time, it is reasonable to assume that Richards merely qualified and expanded ideas Agee had already begun to develop. . . . it is not difficult to imagine his receptivity to Richards's teaching on poetic diction.¹

Richards had published a treatise in 1926 entitled Science and Poetry, stating "a poet works with the 'full body' of words--with, that is, essentially the denotative as well as connotative significance, which reflects the 'whole meaning of the words as the printed signs cannot.'"² Richards' contention reinforced Agee's growing interest in a fresh use of the English language. On November 19, 1930, Agee wrote to his former teacher, Father Flye of the St. Andrews School, Sewanee, Tennessee, describing his aspirations as a writer:

¹Alfred T. Barson, A Way of Seeing (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1972), 33.

²Ibid.

I want to write symphonies. That is, characters introduced quietly (as are themes in a symphony, say) will recur in new light, with new verbal orchestration, will work into counterpoint, and get a sort of monstrous grinding beauty--and so on. . . . Prose holds you down from the possibility of such music. . . . It's got to be narrative poetry, but of a sort that so far as I know has never been tried. . . . I've thought of inventing a sort of amphibious style-prose [sic] that would run into poetry when the occasion demanded poetic expression. That may be the solution; but I don't entirely like the idea. What I want to do is, to devise a poetic diction that will cover the whole range of events as perfectly and evenly as skin covers every organ, vital as well as trivial, of the human body. And this style can't, of course, be incongruous, no matter what I'm writing about.³

Agee's own creative impulses were reinforced by Richards, whose "writings during the mid-1920s and early 1930s were undeniably eye-opening to the young Romantic poet who was trying to establish an organic connection between word and thing."⁴ Agee and Richards were in good company for "the subject interested a good many American poets in the 1920s and 1930s, from Hart Crane to Ezra Pound--an attempt to find modern historical synthesis by recreating ancient myth and folk legend in contemporary poetic language."⁵ Although the exact dimensions of Richards' influence on Agee cannot be measured, a comment of Robert Fitzgerald, editor and colleague of Agee, suggests one benefit: "From these lectures and these classes, James Agee got, I think, a certain literary sharpness that he wouldn't possibly have

³Letters of James Agee to Father Flye, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 47-48.

⁴Barson, Way of Seeing, 33.

⁵Ibid., 20.

gained anywhere else--a kind of sharpness of mind applied to writing."⁶

The term "Word Music" was first applied by Agee to a poem he wrote in 1930, during his second year at Harvard. The poem, "Epithalamium," is itself a model for Agee's transition between the worlds of prose and poetry,⁷ and he included it a few years later in his first volume of poetry, Permit Me Voyage. The term "Word Music" is found in Robert Fitzgerald's transcription of an Agee manuscript version of Permit Me Voyage. Fitzgerald's note at the head of the transcription reads:

Never printed or even typed, this manuscript was found, minus the first page, in a folder of miscellaneous verses and drafts for verses. It must have been written after the book was published.⁸

Agee thus describes his poem "Epithalamium":

This one was done in the spring of my sophomore year, after I had begun to read poetry at Harvard, and that's what you get. Derivative to the rectum and, in fine, a literary exercise. There have been worse, and there have been better. This one has, to its advantage, a fair subtlety and durability of Word Music.⁹

While literary critics seem not yet to have defined "Word Music," Barson uses the term to describe the poetic diction Agee sought during the 1930s, as a solution to the poet's struggle: "The

⁶Ross Spears and Jude Cassidy, Agee: His Life Remembered (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985), 43.

⁷Barson, Way of Seeing, v.

⁸Robert Fitzgerald, The Poems of James Agee and Related Documents (unpublished edition typescript), Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin.

⁹*Ibid.*

closest analogy with his inner feelings and response to reality was in music; hence it was the effect he sought when expressing his response in words."¹⁰ In his recent dissertation, J. Coulson includes the term as part of its title--"Word Music: A Study of American Poetry"--and goes on to use it in a manner that recalls the concepts of Richards and Agee previously cited. In his first chapter Coulson writes:

I am speaking of those prosodic structures that have an effect or function similar to certain techniques in music. Further, I am exclusively concerned with the relationship between word music and word sense under the influence of romantic aesthetics. . . . I will show how the individual poet develops a connection between music and word sense that is characteristically his own.¹¹

Jeanne Concannon, writing seventeen years earlier than Coulson, omitted the term "Word Music" from her discussion, but chose musical adjectives for her description of Agee's prosaic-poetic method of composition: "By the late 1930s these techniques cohere in a style which is distinctly Agee's: rhythmic and harmonic use of the colon; juxtaposition of stresses; repetition of words and sounds--anaphora, alliteration, assonance; combination of adjective and noun; and coined or unusual words."¹²

Keeping in mind Agee's interest in "Word Music," the influence of I.A. Richards' lectures, and some of the characteristic traits of

¹⁰Barson, Way of Seeing, 30.

¹¹Joseph Philip Coulson, "Word Music: A Study of American Poetry" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York-Buffalo, 1985), 1-2.

¹²Jeanne M. Concannon, "The Poetry and Fiction of James Agee: A Critical Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1968), 73.

Agee's prose-poetry, one may appropriately turn to the writing of "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" itself. The creation of the prose-poem sketch is a curious result of Agee's background in poetry and his work as a journalist.

As mentioned in Chapter I, Agee began his writing career working for various New York publications following his graduation from Harvard in 1932. Despite the demands of his new profession, he managed to bring out a volume of poetry, Permit Me Voyage, in 1934, with the help of Archibald Macleish.¹³ As his work load at Fortune magazine steadily increased, Agee found little time to work on his own writing. In 1935, Agee was granted a leave of absence from the magazine, which lasted from November 1935 to May 1936. He and his first wife, Olivia Saunders, used the break to travel to Anna Maria, Florida,¹⁴ where Agee began writing "Knoxville" and other projects. In the spring, he and Olivia returned to New York, driving through Tennessee, so the writer could once more visit with Father Flye. Agee read the lengthy "Knoxville" sketch aloud to his former teacher and lifelong friend.¹⁵

Critics give varying accounts of Agee's writing process in available sources. Doty, describing "Knoxville" as "autobiographical Joycean prose," says "in a 'half-filled' notebook, the writer outlined

¹³Richard R. Schramm, "James Agee (1909-1955)," Fifty Southern Writers Since 1900 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 11.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Mark A. Doty, Tell Me Who I Am (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1981), 38.

the possibility for the work: 'have been working (c.12-15,000 words) on the footloose in Knoxville idea. Don't know.'"16 Kramer's chronology is more precise than that of Schramm or Doty. He writes:

For instance in the spring of 1936, the first extended free time which he experienced after college, some of the best writing he produced was dependent on Tennessee backgrounds. He was on leave from Fortune magazine, and one of his summer projects was the sketch "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," (later used by editors as a prelude for A Death in the Family).17

Genevieve Moreau confuses both issues of chronology and process, but could be describing the polishing of the sketch when she observes:

It was not until May that he finally settled down to work (he was then living on Second Street in French Town), and resumed contact with the literary world. . . . His trips to New York grew less frequent. He devoted himself more to his work, and completed a lyrical piece called "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" which first appeared in the August/September issue of Partisan Review and was later used as the prologue to A Death in the Family.18

Moreau offers useful insight regarding Agee's keen interest in literary experimentation:

Feeling it would be futile to spend much time and effort looking for a title, Agee had originally wished to call the work simply "Short Story," since nothing more original came to his mind. This would have had the additional advantage of startling those readers who truly expected his piece to be a short story, for it differed considerably from the conventional definition of that form. Agee felt that it was necessary to restore life and

16 James Agee, The Collected Short Prose of James Agee with a foreword by Robert Fitzgerald (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 31.

17 Victor A. Kramer, "Agee's Use of Regional Material in A Death in the Family," Appalachian Journal, 1 (Autumn, 1972): 72.

18 Genevieve Moreau, The Restless Journey of James Agee, trans. Miriam Klinger (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1977), 164.

freshness to both the concept and the word STORY, which were in danger of extinction. Eventually he renounced this supposedly provocative gesture, which would likely have gone unnoticed. "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" is a continuation of Agee's literary experiments.¹⁹

Agee provided his own statements about the chronology and writing of "Knoxville: Summer of 1915." In the program notes for the first performances by Eleanor Steber, Serge Koussevitzky, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra (April 9 and 10, 1948), two paragraphs appear in which Agee discusses his text:

Mr. Agee under pressure, has obligingly submitted information about style and intentions in writing 'Knoxville: Summer of 1915':

'I was sketching around, vaguely, on a possible autobiographical novel (about 1937 [sic]), and so was much involved and interested in early childhood memories. I was greatly interested in improvisatory writing, as against carefully composed, multiple draft writing: i.e., with a kind of parallel to improvisation in jazz, or to a certain kind of 'genuine' lyric which, I thought should be purely improvised. This text turned up more out of both states of mind, than anything else: specifically, remembrance of the way water hoses looked and sounded at twilight. This brought nostalgia for much that I remembered very accurately; all I had to do was write it; so the writing was easier than most I have managed. It took possibly an hour and a half; on revision I stayed about 98 percent faithful to my rule, for these 'improvised' experiments, against any revision whatever. There is little if anything consciously invented in it, it is strictly autobiographical.'²⁰

Several points must be made about Agee's comments for the first performances of Barber's Knoxville. The most obvious is the loosely described date of "around 1937" which contradicts the true chronology. With different interests dominating his thoughts, and the passage of

¹⁹Ibid., 164-165.

²⁰Program notes for Samuel Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915 (Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston), 9-10 May, 1948, 1242-1244.

more than a decade, the task of precisely dating the composition of an early experimental work for the publication in program notes may not have been very important to Agee. By 1948 when these performances occurred, Agee had even turned once more to an autobiographical novel which would be published as A Death in the Family. His interests had moved toward the writing of fiction and film.²¹

The second point of interest in these program notes is the author's designation of the process as "improvisatory writing." The form and content of the entire sketch (see Appendix A) suggests an improvisatory approach, but one which only a skilled writer could easily achieve. The tone of the prose-poem "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" does exemplify the type of "'genuine' lyric" Agee sought, as a result of the combination of his desire for powerful musical-literary expression developed in part from his literary studies at Harvard and his four years of experience at Fortune. The prose-poem, completed only two years after the publication of Permit Me Voyage, illustrates what Concannon calls a "style which is distinctly Agee's."

As noted in Chapter I, the focus of the present study is that part of Agee's prose poem selected by Barber to set to music. This portion comprises the last third of the literary work (see Appendix B). A preliminary examination of the prose-poem as a whole does not reveal any unexpected stylistic shifts in the areas to be discussed in this study--namely, word choice which uses poetic devices of sound and

²¹Schramm, "James Agee", 12.

meaning, and the poetic structural devices of word repetition, its accompanying non-systematic punctuation, and the use of one-syllable words for expressive effect.

In his classic guide for the study of poetry, Poetry: Its Appreciation, Louis Untermeyer explains that:

The poet uses words in two ways, and he succeeds or fails in the double use of language-as music and as meaning. . . . the poet has recourse to various devices which might be grouped under two main heads: the sensual, or devices of sound, and the intellectual, or devices of sense. The principal devices of sound are rhyme, assonance, alliteration, repetition, and onomatopoeia. The principal devices of sense are metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, apostrophe, and epithet.²²

Untermeyer continues by subdividing these major devices and explaining their functions in detail. Analysis of Agee's prose-poem in the present study will make use of the definitions and approaches presented by Untermeyer.

DEVICES OF SOUND

Rhyme

Louis Untermeyer proposes five major categories of rhyme occurring in poetry: perfect rhyme, imperfect rhyme, suspended rhyme, dissonance-consonance and internal rhyme. Agee uses three of these types prominently in "Knoxville: Summer of 1915." Perfect rhyme is absent because of the prose form of the composition. In the following paragraphs, the categories of rhyme used by Agee and other poetic devices found in the section of "Knoxville" which Barber

²²Louis Untermeyer, Poetry: Its Appreciation (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1934), 457.

set will be defined and then exemplified from Agee's text.

Definitions of specific poetic devices are taken from Untermeyer's guide. All sounds are represented by Standard International Phonetic Alphabet symbols.

Untermeyer defined imperfect rhyme as "the matching of identical vowel sounds preceded and followed by unlike consonants" and gives the examples "time and mine, late and fade."²³ The first and third paragraphs of "Knoxville" contain several examples of this device including: "rocking gently . . . watching the street," "grass of the back," and the simile, "wide and alive, like a smile." Untermeyer explains dissonance-consonance as "an exact pairing of consonants--all the consonants--instead of matching the vowels" and gives the examples "read-rude, blood-blade, [and] groove-grave."²⁴ In Agee's first paragraph the "rousing and raising" phrase exemplifies his usage of this rhyming device. In internal rhyme, writes Untermeyer, "often the poet half-hides, half-reveals his rhymed words within the lines."²⁵ Agee can be seen doing this when he says the "iron whine rises on rising" in his first paragraph, and when he requests later (paragraph three) that his reader "remember them kindly in their time." The [ɛm] and [aɪ] sounds in the later phrase make a pleasant sequence, appropriate to a plea for kindness.

²³Ibid., 460.

²⁴Ibid., 466.

²⁵Ibid., 462.

Assonance

Another kind of device of sound used in poetry is assonance.

Untermeyer explains assonance as:

. . . A resemblance, rather than a matching; an approximation of sounds. Sometimes the same vowel is used, sometimes merely a similar one, and there is no particular concurrence of consonants as there is in regular rhyme. Blazing-flaming, [and] futile-paddle are examples of assonance.²⁶

Agee can be found using assonance in the sequence "rocking . . . talking . . . watching" in the first paragraph and in his phrase "blue dew" in paragraph two.

Alliteration

Another common poetic device of sound is alliteration.

Untermeyer defines alliteration as "repetition of sounds either at the beginning of two or more words or concealed within the words" and notes that "to achieve its effect--'apt alliteration's artful aid'-- the words must immediately succeed each other or occur at short intervals."²⁷ In his phrase, "hung havens," followed by "hangars," and in the sequence, "streetcar . . . stopping . . . starting, stertorous" in paragraph one, Agee makes much use of this device.

Repetition

"Repetition," notes Untermeyer, "is another favorite method of adding emphasis and music to a poem. It may consist of a phrase

²⁶Ibid., 464.

²⁷Ibid., 464-465.

repeated in various stanzas or a single word at different intervals."²⁸ This device is used with great effect in the Agee text, in the repetition of word, phrase, construction, and clause²⁹ for aural effects like those of beat in meter. (Repetition used for structural purposes is discussed below.) An example of Agee repeating a word is found in the first paragraph with the phrase, "on past and past and past." In paragraph three Agee can be found repeating phrases in the sequence: "of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all." In the next paragraph is another example of phrase repetition: "but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever." In the first paragraph he repeats a construction in the sentence, "People go by: things go by." Establishing patterns of sound by repetition of clause is exemplified in Agee's third paragraph in a series of similar sentences:

One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me.

Onomatopoeia

The final poetic device of sound to be discussed in the present context is onomatopoeia, which "merely means," according to

²⁸Ibid., 469.

²⁹For purposes of this analysis, the following definition will be used: CLAUSE--"a group of words containing a subject and predicate and functioning as a member of a compound or complex sentence. . . ." as found in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1985, 246.

Untermeyer, "'to make a name.'"³⁰ He goes on immediately to say, "The making or forming of a word by imitating its sound is the simplest and probably the oldest of devices." In Agee's first paragraph, onomatopoeia is present when he writes, "iron increasing moan . . . on past and past and past . . . the bleak spark crackling and cursing . . language to convey the image of a streetcar, not through choice of detail to evoke pictures, but through choice of words that make sounds similar to the sounds of large, moving machinery. The [s], [k], and [t] sounds are especially effective in this sequence. In the second paragraph is a very different example of onomatopoeia, which is the "noise of the locusts . . . at once enchants my eardrums."

DEVICES OF SENSE

When a text is set to music, poetic devices of sense (i.e. meaning) can easily be lost. The elements of musical pitch, rhythm, texture, and duration alter the spoken sounds and their characteristic rhythms, and then compete with them with by virtue of their own unique aural effects. However thorough one's comprehension of the music may be, the performer still needs to be aware of the intellectual appeals of the words being sung, the devices of sense. Again, Louis Untermeyer's definitions of the three types of poetic devices found in Agee's text have been used, and examples taken from the portion of Agee's "Knoxville" set to music by Samuel Barber.

³⁰Untermeyer, Poetry, 470.

Simile

The poetic device known as simile exists, according to Untermeyer when "comparison between objects which are alike only in the point of comparison" occurs and "when the comparison is introduced by 'like' or 'as.'"³¹ A good example of simile in Agee's work can be found in paragraph one in "the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit." In the third paragraph, stars are said to "seem each like a smile of great sweetness." The first comparison is easily grasped; Agee suggests the spark of the streetcar wheels against their tracks is a living, even harmful entity. The disruption wrought by a streetcar could be interpreted several ways. The streetcar could seem menacing as a sign of technological advancement which would inevitably change the serene neighborhood, or it could imply departure from the neighborhood and the sundering of social ties. When Agee links stars and smiles through the device of simile, he compares the light radiating from the shining star to the warmth and light of a human smile, the named link being the great sweetness of each.

Metonymy

Another type of comparison used in poetic writing is metonymy. Untermeyer explains metonymy as "the substitution of one thing to represent another," going on to point out that "it must be a

³¹Ibid., 471.

suggestive substitution, an attribute of the thing meant."³² When Agee writes of "the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard, and starched milk" he appeals to a set of sensory memories of taste and smell stemming from the eating of ice cream. Even a sense of the packaging is evoked here, in the inclusion of "pasteboard."

In the second paragraph, Agee presents "a frailing of fire who breathes" to introduce a firefly to the composition. This example of metonymy requires close attention. The glowing insect is suggested by the general meaning of the root word "frail" involved in Agee's phrase and the suggestion that it is an object which lives is made through the addition "who breathes." Fireflies and ice cream are stock ingredients of summer evenings in many hometowns, and Agee's means of including them here are strikingly creative and original.

Epithet

In poetry, an epithet is "a word--usually an adjective--which describes an object with particular exactness."³³ Agee's "hollow iron music" in paragraph one portrays the sound of horseshoes on the street as an empty, ringing, metallic music, implying both rhythmic pattern and change of pitch. A little later, his "clowns in hueless amber" permits several possible interpretations. An exact poetic description of an inexpensive piece of glass bric-a-brac, typically found in the

³²Ibid., 473.

³³Ibid., 475.

households of Agee's childhood neighborhood may be what was meant. Perhaps, instead, he chose this image to provide contrast within the context of the complete phrase: "the image upon them of lovers and horsemen squared with clowns in hueless amber." (mm. 28-32) The contrast between the exalted images of gallant "lovers and horsemen" and common pieces of colorless glass is striking.

Using as a foundation for discussion this survey of the poetic devices of sound and meaning Agee used in the portion of "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" which Barber set to music, closer attention may now be paid to the poetic structural devices the writer employed. Word repetition, the somewhat idiosyncratic punctuation it necessitated, and Agee's use of one-syllable words are prominent among these devices.

WORD REPETITION AND PUNCTUATION

The examples cited above in the section illustrating Agee's use of repetition of word, phrase, construction, and clause serve a dual purpose. When such examples are read aloud, it becomes apparent that repetition shapes the rhythm of each line of Agee's prose. The "Knoxville" text requires a spoken delivery to achieve its best effect, as does almost all poetry;³⁴ the aural effects of the text may well have contributed to Barber's interest in the prose-poem. Putting

³⁴Conversations with various authorities, including Agee biographer James Bergreen, Dr. Charles E. Davis and Dr. Charles P. Tisdale, both of the University of North Carolina Greensboro Department of English, and Dr. Richard R. Schramm of the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, emphasize the importance of the aural element in Agee's text.

aside the obvious result of the rhythm generated through the device of word repetition, Agee may have chosen this device to achieve the "improvisatory" effect of "Knoxville" he described in 1948.³⁵ Another explanation is suggested by the opening line of the complete text (also found as a heading to the first page of the Barber Knoxville score):

We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville Tennessee in the time that I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child.³⁶

Word repetition helps create the effect of a relaxed conversation recalling these summer evenings--quite a different thing from written recollection. The use of repetition also serves to strengthen the sense of a child's remembering. In any event, Agee's reliance on word repetition to evoke nostalgic recollection has structural consequences. Sentences vary greatly in length (Appendix B) from very short (second sentence of paragraph one--six words, two clauses) to very long (sentence four of paragraph one--seventy-five words, using repetition of clause and phrase). Varying sentence length gives Agee the freedom to combine any poetic devices of sound or meaning he wishes, thus permitting him to write using a new poetic diction which is not restricted by the structural constraints of verse.

The variety of repetition also results in unusual combinations or strings of words which require punctuation. The longest sentences use

³⁵See 20.

³⁶James Agee, "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," Partisan Review V, no. 3 (August-September 1938): 22.

commas, semicolons, and colons in unconventional groupings. Use of the colon does not always indicate the end of a clause; use of the semicolon does not always indicate the end of a phrase, etc.

According to Barson, use of the colon serves Agee's purpose "to use words as units of sound, reproducing a nonverbal 'word-music.'"³⁷

Agee's punctuation may seem idiosyncratic or "improvisatory" but it is often important in contributing to the special effects his compositions arouse. The variety of punctuation within sentences becomes very important to Samuel Barber's approach to the setting of the text; selected examples of the punctuation's effect on musical structure will be explored in Chapter III.

USE OF ONE-SYLLABLE WORDS

Agee's choice of one-syllable words is one of the most interesting facets of the "Knoxville" sketch. The writer's repetitions and his combinations of words of various lengths make each one-syllable word stand out in contrast. According to Untermeyer, "For sensuous effects, however, poets have leaned toward words of more than one syllable."³⁸ The English language, however, is "essentially a monosyllabic tongue."³⁹ The challenge of creating some type of poetic rhythm within a prosaic structure is eased somewhat by Agee's use of different kinds of word repetition; similarly,

³⁷Barson, Way of Seeing, 64.

³⁸Untermeyer, Poetry, 456.

³⁹Ibid.

repetition of polysyllabic words makes the one-syllable words rhythmically and structurally important. When Agee selects a monosyllabic word, that word interrupts whatever word rhythm has been established by the polysyllabic words in the same context. Two examples of this are especially interesting for their rhythmic and structural consequences.

The first example is the famous "Now is the night one blue dew" (see Appendix B). Agee here operates on several perceptual levels. The sentence composed entirely of one-syllable words provides sharp contrast to the first three sentences of paragraph one. The word rhythm slows and nearly stops, indicating the end of a structural division corresponding to the event of a disappearing streetcar in the twilight of Agee's quiet neighborhood. Agee begins the next paragraph with a restatement: "Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose." The sentence is heard essentially as another string of monosyllables. The restatement of "Now is the night one blue dew," serves as a transition between one division and another of the sketch. The string of one-syllable words is then extended, acting to introduce more of the recollection. The word rhythm moves slowly, but the extension through a greater number of one-syllable words carries the prose forward.

The second example of Agee's skillful use of monosyllabic words is found in the last sentence of the text, a lengthy compound sentence, which ends with the words "but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am." Here single

syllables turn over and over, forming a rhythmic pattern to bring the piece to conclusion. The only two-syllable word, "ever" is repeated twice, creating obvious dramatic emphasis and interesting movement to interrupt the flat, final repetitions of "not." It is a powerful ending.

Looking closely at the fine details of Agee's use of language in "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" gives considerable insight into his mastery of poetic devices and increases appreciation of the prose-poem. Just how Samuel Barber used this work to inspire and complement his mastery in the area of musical composition is the subject of Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

MUSIC

When "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" is considered as song text instead of prose-poem, a different critical approach is in order. There are several reasons for this. To serve as a libretto or song text, a literary composition must include interesting word rhythms, colorful imagery, and expressive communication of content and mood. Further, according to Philip Miller: "Whatever the quality in a poem that makes it right for musical setting, a composer's success may be measured in inevitability--the conviction that the poem was destined for just this music, and that the music could have been written only for the poem."¹

James Agee's interest in the concept he called "Word Music" (discussed in Chapter II) in itself suggests his writing might lend itself to musical setting. Through word choice based equally on the sound and on the intellectual perception of the word, Agee created interesting word rhythms, employing the poetic devices of rhyme, assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, as well as word repetition and skillful use of one-syllable words; through word choice, Agee creates evocative imagery by using established poetic devices of simile, metonymy, and epithet. The combination of interesting word rhythms

¹Philip L. Miller, The Ring of Words (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), xxvi.

and evocative imagery is effective in conveying a range of childhood memories.

All or any of this could have stimulated Samuel Barber's interest in Agee's prose-poem. Equally provocative to the composer may have been the lengthy, rambling, and unorthodox text. Barber's creative use of the Agee text as the basis for the composition of music could be approached from many perspectives. Here, however, analysis is directed toward matching aspects of Barber's music to the specific textual aspects of Agee's writing which have been discussed above. Using the composer's piano reduction of his Knoxville: Summer of 1915, the present study will include:

1. Preliminary description of length, vocal range and tessitura, and Barber's piano reduction
2. Diagrams and commentary regarding musical form, harmonic language, motivic organization, and texture
3. Analysis of correspondences of text to music, specifically
 - a. Structural response
 - i. Omissions of portions of the Agee text
 - ii. Treatment of the examples of poetic structural devices already described (repetition of word, phrase, clause; use of one-syllable words)
 - iii. Influence of selected examples of Agee's punctuation
 - b. Melodic response
 - i. Treatment of examples of poetic devices of sound
 - ii. Influence of the implied rhythm within examples of the text
 - (a) spoken textual rhythm
 - (b) rhythm affected by word repetition
 - (c) rhythm affected by punctuation
 - (d) treatment of one- and two-syllable words
 - (e) syllabic and melismatic text-setting

Through this process the effectiveness of Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" as song-text may be gauged. Conclusions drawn from this analysis are presented in Chapter IV.

Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915, approximately sixteen minutes long, has a vocal compass of nearly two octaves with a medium-high tessitura [a'-c-sharp']. The work may be performed with symphonic or chamber orchestra or with the composer's piano reduction. As mentioned in Chapter I, the composer wrote all three versions in early April, 1947. The chamber orchestra version is written for flute, piccolo, clarinet in A, bassoon, two horns in F, trumpet in C, harp, and string quintet (violin I and II, viola, violoncello, and bass). The piano reduction contains "instrumental indications [which] refer to original version for full orchestra."² Recordings are available of both orchestral versions.³

The form of Barber's composition has been analyzed as a rondo by Jean Kreiling and Russell Friedewald. Friedewald describes the work as "a five-part rondo with an introduction and coda (Introduction A¹ BA² CA³ Coda)."⁴ Kreiling adds a few more specifics to her formal analysis of Knoxville, providing the following scheme: Prelude A B C A' D P' [Prelude'] A".⁵

²Samuel Barber, Knoxville: Summer of 1915 (New York: G. Schirmer, 1949), 3.

³Voice with full orchestra--Leontyne Price, soprano; New Philharmonia Orchestra; Thomas Schippers, conductor, RCA Gold Seal AGL1-5221. Voice with chamber orchestra--Eleanor Steber, soprano; Dumbarton Oaks Chamber Orchestra; William Stickland, conductor, Columbia Legendary Performances ML 5843.

⁴Russell Friedewald, "Analysis of Published Music of Samuel Barber" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1957), 62.

⁵Jean Louise Kreiling, "The Songs of Samuel Barber: A Study of Literary Taste and Text-Setting" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 1986), 182.

This writer concurs with the description of rondo form (see Figure 1). A rondo or rondo-like form, with its implied use of the principle of musical statement, contrast, and restatement, is suitable for the Agee text, itself a lengthy and segmented recollection. Barber's skillful editing of the text complements the rhapsodic nature of Agee's writing by emphasizing the poetic devices of sound already present in the patterns of words. This emphasis generates the structure as well as some of the melodic content of the work and is the subject of more commentary below.

Within Barber's use of the rondo principle of statement-contrast-restatement, the variety of harmonic language corresponds to the segmented quality of Agee's text. By relying on a type or types of harmonic vocabulary--tertian, chromatic, modal, or pandiatonic harmony--for each division of the rondo form, Barber complements the changing moods of the recollection. As shown in Figure 1, the five large sections--A, B, A', C, A"--are unified by the use of pandiatonic and modal harmony in each of the A sections (mm. 1-40, 114-127, 231-263). Section B (mm. 41-98) is made up of chromatic as well as modal harmony; section C (mm. 128-217) relies more on pandiatonic writing. Transitions from section to section vary, using chromatic writing of the B section as well as the tertian harmonic language established in the introduction and restated in the coda.

Motivic analysis could easily overtake any other perspective of Barber's piece. This writer has identified thirteen motives, which in this analysis are defined as melodic and harmonic musical ideas which occur both within sections of Barber's work to provide

Figure 1. Formal Analysis of Samuel Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915

INTRODUCTION		A	
<u>Adagio ma non troppo</u>		<u>Andante, un poco mosso</u>	
C-----12-----TRANS-----		8	
[####] f#		[/////] f#/A	[####] B
		[^~~~]	
motive 1, m. 1		motive 3, m. 6	motives 4-6
motive 2, m. 2		motive 4, m. 7	
		motive 5, m. 8	
		motive 6, m. 24	
orchestra only		"It has become. . ."	orch. only
mm. 1-5		mm. 6-31	mm. 32-40
{1111}		{0000}	{0000}
B		A'	
<u>Allegro agitato</u>			
C-----TRANS-----		3-----TRANS---	
		2	
[~~~~] c/e/E	[####] A	[/////] f#/A	[~~~~] A
[^~~~~] A		[^~~~~]	
motive 7, m. 43	motives 7, 10	motives 3-6	motive 10
motive 8, m. 45			
motive 9, m. 45			
motive 10, m. 54			
motive 11, m. 56			
"A streetcar. . ."	"Now is the..."	"Parents on. . ."	orch. only
mm. 41-98	mm. 99-113	mm. 114-123	mm. 124-7
{1111}	{0000}	{0000}	{1111}

Figure 1 Continued

C		
<u>Allegretto</u>		<u>Meno mosso</u>
3-----	<u>piu agitato</u>	-----
4		
[////] d/F/f/Ab	[^^^^] F [^^^^] g	[####] d
motive 12, m. 130	motives 2, 12	motives 1-2
motive 13, m. 130		
motives 1, 4		
"On the rough wet grass. . ."	"By some chance. . ."	"May God. . ."
mm. 128-182	mm. 183-201	mm. 202-217
{@@@@}	{@@@@}	{1111}
A"		
<u>Come prima, un poco mosso</u>		
TRANS-----	12-----	-----
	8	
[####] f#	[////] f#/A [^^^^]	[////] f#/A [####] A
motives 1-2	motives 3-6	motives 3-6, 11
orch. only	"After a little. . ."	orch. only
mm. 218-230	mm. 231-254	mm. 255-263
{1111}	{@@@@}	{@@@@}

LEGEND

[] indicates prevailing harmonic language

TERTIAN	[####]
CHROMATIC	[~~~~]
MODAL	[^^^^]
PANDIATONIC	[////]

{ } indicates texture

HOMOPHONIC	{@@@@}
melody and accompaniment	

POLYPHONIC	{1111}
varying number of voices, all of equal importance	

Measure numbers for the first appearance of each motive are given.

contrast as demanded by the text and throughout the work to provide unity within the rondo form. As seen in Figure 2, statements of the A section (mm. 1-40, 114-127, 231-263) contain motives 3-6, with motive 10 used in the transitional A' section (mm. 114-127). Section B (mm. 41-98) uses motives 7-11; section C (mm. 128-217) restates motivic material from the introduction (motives 1,2,4) along with the new motives 12-13. Motives 1 and 2 from the introduction recur as transition figures in the Meno mosso portion of section C (mm. 202-217) and as transition material (mm. 218-230) returning to the final statement of A (mm. 231-263). In these measures, motives 1 and 2 appear in augmentation as linear melodic material. In the introduction, the motives are heard as contrapuntal ideas of equal importance within the texture.

The unity of rondo form, which Barber reinforced through specifically chosen harmonic language and easily identifiable motives, imposes a type of structural unity on the text. The musical structure thus strengthens Agee's recollection through the melodic and harmonic recall of section A. Barber writes statements of the A section for lines of text which in the first two instances are third-person description--"It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches" (mm. 6-32) and "People on porches. . . . From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient faces." (mm. 114-119). As the second appearance of the A section continues, (mm. 120-123), the transition to section C begins. Barber writes four bars of recitative as part of the transition material; at this point, the first shift of narrative occurs in the text--"The dry and exalted noise of the

Figure 2. Motivic Analysis of Samuel Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915

Motives 1-5

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system is for the Voice and Piano, marked *Adagio ma non troppo* in 4/4 time. The Voice part has a whole rest. The Piano part features *Motive 1* (a descending eighth-note scale) and *Motive 2* (a descending eighth-note scale). Dynamics include *p* and *mf*. The second system is for the Piano, marked *Andante, un poco mosso* in 12/8 time. It includes *Motive 3* (a descending eighth-note scale) and *Motive 4* (a descending eighth-note scale). Dynamics include *p* and *mf*. The third system is for the Voice and Piano, marked *Andante, un poco mosso* in 12/8 time. The Voice part has a whole rest. The Piano part features *Motive 5* (a descending eighth-note scale) and *Motive 4* (a descending eighth-note scale). Dynamics include *p* and *mf*. The lyrics are: "It has be-come that time of eve-ning when peo-ple sit on their porch-es,".

Adagio ma non troppo 4/4

Voice

Piano

Motive 1

Motive 2

p

mf

Motive 3

Motive 4

Motive 5

p

mf

It has be-come that time of eve-ning when peo-ple sit on their porch-es,

Figure 2 Continued

Motive 6

Figure 2 Continued
Motive 6

The musical score for Motive 6 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It begins with a measure marked with a box containing the number 3. The lyrics are: "ual-ly the taste boy-ring o-ver them of va-nil-la,". The piano accompaniment is in treble and bass clefs, with a key signature of two sharps. It includes a section marked "cantando" and a measure marked with the number 24. A bracket labeled "motive 6" spans across the vocal line and the piano accompaniment.

Motives 7-9

The musical score for Motives 7-9 is divided into three systems. The first system is marked "Allegro agitato" and includes parts for Ww (Woodwinds), Perc. (Percussion), and Cl. (Clarinet). The second system includes parts for r.h. (right hand), Ob. (Oboe), and v. pizz. (violin pizzicato). The third system includes parts for VI. I (Violin I), Ww (Woodwinds), and a section marked "poco f". Brackets labeled "motive 7" and "motive 8" indicate specific musical phrases. The score is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of two sharps.

Figure 2 Continued

Motives 10-11

Figure 2 Continued shows Motives 10-11. The score is for a piano and violin. The piano part is in the lower register, and the violin part is in the upper register. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked *mf* *espr.*. The score includes measures 54 and 55. Motive 10 is indicated in the piano part, and Motive 11 is indicated in the violin part.

Motives 12-13

Motives 12-13. The score is for a piano and violin. The piano part is in the lower register, and the violin part is in the upper register. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked *Allegretto* $\text{♩} = 60$. The score includes measures 128 and 129. Motive 12 is indicated in the violin part, and Motive 13 is indicated in the piano part. The tempo is marked *a tempo*. The piano part is marked *p*.

Motives 12-13 (continued). The score is for a piano and violin. The piano part is in the lower register, and the violin part is in the upper register. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked *p* *very*. The score includes measures 133 and 134. Motive 12 is indicated in the violin part, and Motive 13 is indicated in the piano part. The tempo is marked *mf*. The piano part is marked *p*. The violin part is marked *On the muted Str.*

locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums." The last statement of section A (mm. 234-254) continues in the first-person narrative. The shift from the third- to the first-person is unified through Agee's use of alliteration, assonance, and word repetition in those three portions of the prose-poem. Through rondo structure using the recall of section A, Barber organizes his composition so as to underscore and unify the shift of narrative.

Texture, here defined as the relationship between simultaneous voices working together to form harmonies, also varies somewhat with the segment of text under consideration. As Figure 1 shows, generally homophonic texture, that is, melody and accompaniment, predominates. The most striking contrast to the prevailing homophonic texture occurs during Barber's writing for the portion of the text which describes the approaching streetcar (mm. 41-98). Here Barber combines motives 7-11 in a more polyphonic texture, which provides contrast to the prevailing homophonic writing. This approach also produces a faster rate of harmonic motion and increases musical tension in section B.

BARBER'S STRUCTURAL RESPONSE TO "KNOXVILLE: SUMMER OF 1915"

Barber's structural response to Agee's text could have resulted from direct collaboration between poet and composer. However, this interesting possibility is, for the time being, only a matter of speculation. A few commentators mention a casual acquaintance between

the two men, but no definite link has been established.⁶ With or without Agee's direct assistance, Barber's careful editing of the long prose-poem is evident when the two versions are compared (see Appendices A and B). The composer selected approximately the last third of the Agee text for his music, but included the opening sentence of the original text as a caption above the opening measures of the score. Barber omits the careful descriptions of Agee's neighborhood, neighbors, the twilight, and the action of the men watering the lawns that follow Agee's first sentence. In the description of the men watering their lawns, the verb tense shifts from past to present, and throughout the description of the locusts' singing, the present tense is more consistently used. Barber begins his text-setting, with "it has become that time of evening" from the last clause of a complex sentence. From this point Barber adheres faithfully to the text with few exceptions; a few lines are dropped from the stanzaic grouping, and one sentence and one clause are omitted from the paragraph immediately following. However, where Agee's characteristic repetitions are concerned, Barber neither adds nor subtracts. Agee's unusual use of punctuation also emphasizes the improvisatory and nostalgic mood of "Knoxville." Barber's willingness to retain Agee's odd punctuation and his word repetitions indicates the composer's understanding of and respect for the text.

⁶John Ardoin, "Samuel Barber at Capricorn," Musical America 8 (March, 1960): 4 and Genevieve Moreau, The Restless Journey of James Agee (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1977), 258.

Barber's structural approach to the prose-poem excerpt is easily discernible. Figure 1 supplies the initial words of each section of prose which correspond to sections within the musical structure. The first long paragraph as set by Barber is almost equally divided into two major sections, A (mm. 6-31) and B (mm. 41-99). The stanzaic section beginning with the restatement of "Now is the night one blue dew" is marked by transition and return of A material (mm. 105-123). The next long paragraph "On the rough wet grass of the back yard" becomes part C (mm. 128-217) in the rondo scheme, and the last statement of musical material A (mm. 213-263) corresponds to the last paragraph of the Agee prose-poem. The musical sections as structured by Barber underscore the shift of narrative and the changes of activity within the prose-poem.

Section A (mm. 1-40, 114-127, 231-263) in each appearance is distinguished by Barber's use of pandiatonicism;⁷ the tonal center oscillates between the key areas of f-sharp minor and A major.⁸ The slow harmonic motion allows the rhythms of Agee's text to dominate; this section makes use of the poetic devices of imperfect rhyme, internal rhyme, alliteration, and repetition of construction.

In section B (mm. 41-98), the streetcar passing through the neighborhood is heard; Barber composed this with a highly chromatic

⁷This type of harmonic language is defined as "the use of the diatonic scale instead of the chromatic scale as a tonal basis without conventional harmonic limitations. . . ." in Harvard Dictionary of Music, 2nd ed., s.v. "Pandiatonicism."

⁸Friedewald, "Published Music of Samuel Barber," 69.

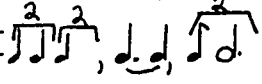
harmonic vocabulary, using an agitated style which is descriptive. The faster harmonic motion complements the rapid rate of syllable change, emphasizing Agee's use of alliteration, word repetition, and onomatopoeia.

An unusual feature of Agee's "Knoxville" is the appearance of the line-groupings in the second "paragraph" of the excerpt. Comparison of these lines in both the complete version (see Appendix A) and the portion Barber set to music (see Appendix B) shows a stanzaic grouping. Barber did not set each word of the original stanzaic section, but he attempted to maintain the grouping through other methods. This is an indication of Barber's respect for Agee's wish to preserve the structure as it had appeared in the Partisan Reader printing. Agee scholar Victor A. Kramer, in response to the present author's questions about the appearance of the line-groupings of the second section, writes the following:

The question about the "stanza" of the group of sixteen lines would be impossible to answer without a copy of the manuscript, and to my knowledge none exists. However there is lots of evidence in biographical data to support the thesis that Agee's tone and music permeated his work. Thus, I would think that your question about the section being set apart may well be answered, "yes." It may well be an experiment for both eye and ear.⁹

Transition material (mm. 99-113) and the return of section A (mm. 114-123) correspond to Agee's stanzaic second paragraph of the Barber setting. Several poetic devices are present, but the most arresting is the use of one-syllable words both to close section B (mm. 94-100)

⁹Victor A. Kramer to Jane Mathew, Greensboro, 15 July, 1988.

and to begin the return of section A (mm. 105-107). The sentence "Now is the night one blue dew," with its reliance on assonance and one-syllable words, effectively slows the rhythms of the agitated section B. Barber uses long note values and a steadily ascending melodic line in each instance to emphasize the one-syllable words, both as closing material in part B and as the transition sentence to the return of section A (mm. 114-123). Poetic devices of sound, i.e., assonance and alliteration, are present; however, the greatest influence of the devices of sound is seen in Barber's treatment of "The dry and exalted noise of the locusts," an onomatopoeic line, which in Barber's score (mm. 120-123) appears as a quasi-recitative section. The return of the "oscillating" emphasis on two key areas re-establishes the nostalgic sound of the first A section statement immediately before "The dry and exalted noise of the locusts." The restatement of the first-used harmonic language of the A sections underscores Barber's quasi-recitative treatment of the onomatopoeic line. The singular melodic treatment of repeated pitches, in the lower part of the soprano range, on the sixth and fifth scale degrees of A-major, allows the spoken rhythms of the text to dominate. The composer also emphasizes the [z] and [s] phonemes by using rhythmic values of varying lengths [] for the syllables which end with [z] and [s]. The subtle variation of rhythm delineates the phonemes within the low, murmuring melodic writing.

Section C (mm. 128-217), which corresponds to the last long paragraph of Agee's sketch, begins with an emphasis on new key areas

of d-minor and F-major. The use of descending fourths and fifths in the bass line in a pattern which ends on F gives a momentary sense of arrival in the key of F (mm. 130-134) and is then followed by a different pattern of descending pitches in the bass line which ends on D (mm. 136-137). The resulting harmonic ambiguity is not unlike Barber's pandiatonic writing in the A sections (mm. 6-31, 105-123, 213-263). Sections A and C also share a similar rate of harmonic rhythm. The sections do differ in the tonal centers emphasized (section A--f-sharp and A; section C--d and F) and in motivic material used (section A--motives 3-6; section C--motives 1, 2, 4, 12, 13). The slow rate of harmonic motion in Section C promotes the poetic devices Agee uses, that is, imperfect rhyme, word repetition, and simile.

The interval of the fourth, as used in motive 12, creates an undulating effect. Barber's manipulation of the interval takes many forms. The fourth is found in motives 1, 2, 3, and 5 of section A, motive 9 of section B, and motive 12 of section C. In motives 1, 2, 5, 9, and 12, the interval is used melodically; in motive 3, the interval is used harmonically. Often, the interval is present as a compositional element, motivic or non-motivic. The first setting of text to the interval is found in the singer's opening phrases (m. 8), when the f-sharp-a-b pattern is used melodically in section A (mm. 8, 10, 12-14, 17, etc.) and in transition material to section B (m. 32 [transposed], m. 39). In section B, the interval of the fourth is slightly changed, appearing as a-sharp-f-sharp-b (m. 68); the pitches

a-sharp-b then act as an anchor for Barber's chromatic treatment of the text "the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it, like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks" (mm. 72-75). The interval reappears in original form (f-sharp-a-b) in the second statement of section A (mm. 116, 118, 119 [bass line]). With this interval well-established in the first 127 bars of Knoxville, Barber once more uses the interval as a point of departure for section C. Within motive 12, the pitches outlining the fourth are organized differently. The pattern is now f-f-B-flat-a (mm. 130-131, 145-146, 147-148 etc.). The new pattern conveys a sense of forward motion through pitch repetition and the half-step resolution down (B-flat-a) in mid-pattern.

The last statement of section A (mm. 231-263) corresponds to the last two sentences of Agee's text. Restatement of earlier A section materials (mm. 6-31 and 114-123) supports the prose; once more, Agee utilizes one-syllable words to end the sketch, as well as the poetic devices of internal rhyme, alliteration, repetition of phrase, and simile. Barber fittingly uses long note values in the melody, with an ascending shape to bring the piece to a close; the long note values and ascending melodic shape (mm. 245-254) emphasize the repetition of one-syllable words in the climactic sentence "but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am."

At no time are words repeated beyond Agee's characteristic word repetition. None of Barber's textual omissions detract from either the mood or the sequence of events of the text. As suggested earlier, Barber's decision to set the last third of the text allows the same

tense to be used throughout the composition, thus unifying the text. Some of the omissions, such as the omission of nine lines from the stanzaic paragraph, are appropriate (see Appendix A and B); the words omitted are not particularly "singable"; nor do they add significantly to the atmosphere already established by Agee.

So far, this analysis of Barber's structural response to Agee's text has identified Knoxville as a rondo form, with four types of harmonic language and thirteen motivic ideas used to unify and vary sections within the rondo. The prevalent use of homophonic texture in the work has been noted, and the correspondences between portions of Agee's text and sections of Barber's rondo have been specified. One additional structural influence, Agee's complex and non-systematic punctuation, remains to be discussed.

The structure suggested by Agee's punctuation does not consistently correspond to the large-scale musical structure of Barber's Knoxville; indeed, much of the influence of the punctuation is best discussed at lower levels of structure, that is in the context of its role in suggesting the shaping of Barber's melodic phrasing. However, in one striking example, Agee's punctuation does directly influence Barber's large-scale musical structure.

The reader is referred to the fourth sentence of the first paragraph of the Agee text Barber set to music (Appendix B). The sentence which begins "A streetcar raising its iron moan," as noted above, appears at the beginning of the B section of Barber's rondo (mm. 41-98). The section is distinguished by a shift to a highly

chromatic harmonic vocabulary and a rapid rate of harmonic change throughout the entire sentence which describes the streetcar's movement through the neighborhood. The sentence is long, and marked by a variety of punctuation which breaks the sentence into thirteen fragments of unequal length. Five new motives (Figure 2) are introduced and are combined in a linear fashion throughout the section. The linear emphasis creates a different texture; at the vocal entrance, measure 59, the voice becomes part of the frantic activity already taking place. The motives combine and recombine in various ways with the vocal line, giving the solo line the role of equal partner with the accompaniment rather than the dominant role assumed by the homophonic texture Barber uses in sections A and C.

The thirteen fragments of the complex sentence are separated into word, phrase, and clause. The punctuation includes the conventional markings, semicolon, comma, and colon, but in several cases, a punctuation mark functions differently from the way it works in conventional usage. The semicolons following one-syllable words in the sequence "faints; halts;" are but one example of this creative deviation. Agee's interest in "Word Music"--that is word choice dependent equally on the sound as well as the sense of words--is particularly evident here. Reading this descriptive sentence aloud with a fair recitation of its repetition of word rhythms and emphasis upon specific consonants (such as the [s], [t], [z], [f] sounds) reproduces the effect of the streetcar. The fragmented nature of the sentence allows a jagged, asymmetric, large shape fitting the acoustic

effect of the sound of the streetcar approaching and departing. Barber does not separate the fragments musically in the same manner Agee did poetically; however, the asymmetric phrasing does contribute to the effectiveness of the B section. Some textual fragments are combined to form a single two- or four-bar phrase, such as "A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping" (mm. 59-61) or "the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts" (mm. 76-79). Other longer fragments are set as phrases, such as "rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan" (mm. 64-66) or "the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks" (mm. 72-75).

The motivic activity in the orchestra continues in its own fashion; meanwhile, the voice carries the text in asymmetrical melodic phrases, but does not always repeat or restate the orchestral motives. The only motive which serves double duty as orchestral motive and vocal melodic material is motive 10, identified as a "chromatic link" (Figure 2). The composer's use of rapidly changing harmonies, new motivic material, and asymmetric phrasing, in a texture which is alternately polyphonic and homophonic, fits the most important elements of Agee's unorthodox sentence. The "Word Music" description, with its swift changes of imagery, reliance on word repetition, and unconventional punctuation requires a distinctive musical treatment. Barber's response gives each segment of the text its relative importance, so that all come together with powerful result.

BARBER'S MELODIC RESPONSE TO "KNOXVILLE: SUMMER OF 1915"

With the presentation of the material regarding specific aspects of Barber's structural response to the original Agee prose-poem in place, attention may now be turned to the second major point of discussion of the influence of the Agee text upon Barber's composition--namely, the influence of text upon the melodies Barber wrote for Knoxville: Summer of 1915. As stated previously, two areas of analysis will be discussed: (1) Barber's musical treatment of selected examples of Agee's poetic devices of sound, and (2) Barber's response to the rhythms of speech implied by the text.

Considerable attention was devoted to Agee's use of poetic devices in Chapter II. How Barber created melody in response to these devices is the next matter for consideration, and for purposes of the present study, discussion will be limited to a certain number of specific compositional means. These include agogic accent (emphasis through duration), dynamic accent (emphasis through use of crescendo, decrescendo, or other types of dynamic variation and contrast), metric accent (emphasis through placement of syllables on important beats of the prevailing meter), pitch accent (emphasis through unexpected melodic dissonance) and rhythmic accent (emphasis through syncopation or the unexpected division of a beat). Examples illustrating Barber's techniques are the same as those discussed above in Chapter II.

Agee's poetic devices of sound include the various rhyme types, assonance, alliteration, word repetition, and onomatopoeia. Musical examples and discussion of Barber's writing follow.

Example 1a. Imperfect Rhyme:

"rocking gently . . . and watching the street" mm. 9-10

In "rocking" and "watching," the vowel sound [a] is preceded by the consonant sounds [r] and [w] and followed by consonant sounds [k] and [t]. The "-ing" ending of both words provides additional sonance in a rhythmic shape. The composer promotes the poetic device through a combination of agogic and metric accent within motives 4 and 5.

"Rocking," written as [♪♪] is a slight agogic alteration from the initial appearance of motive 4 in bar 7 [♪♪♪]. "Watching" maintains the same rhythmic shape as in the first appearance of motive 5 in bar 8 [♪♪]. Both words fall on important beats of the measure, receiving metric emphasis. This results in good prosody and is effective against the steady accompaniment of motive 3. The evocative motion in the bass line is appropriate for the opening lines of the recollection.

Example 1b.

16

15 *p very*
On the
muted Strs.

mf *p*

simply
rough wet grass of the back-yard my fa-ther and moth-er— have spread

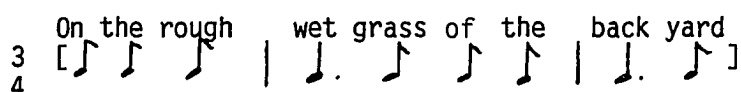
mp
quits... We all lie there, my moth-er, my fa-ther, my un-cle, my

p
aunt, — and I too am ly-ing there.

pizz. *pp*

"On the rough wet grass of the back yard" mm. 138-139.

This poetic device, which pairs rhyming vowels [æ] with dissimilar preceding and following consonants, is underscored rhythmically, motivically, and agogically in Barber's realization. The second appearance of motive 12 in bar 137 has the same pitch content as first heard in measure 130, but has a different rhythmic organization. Barber displaces the motive by an eighth-note and adds an eighth-note melodically. In measure 130, the motive begins on the second half of beat two; in measure 137, the motive begins on beat three. If the composer had simply restated motive 12 with its original organization in bar 137, the prosody would be awkward:



The composer's modification allows for successful prosody; Barber places both "grass" and "back" on the same pitch level at approximately the same place in the successive measures, a motivic emphasis. "Grass" receives additional emphasis of agogic accent through its [♩.] value. "Back" has a tenuto marking, which indicates the composer has taken pains to remove any expected 3/4 metric emphasis through the unexpected emphasis on the second half of beat 1 in measure 139. The resulting rhythmic ambiguity, discussed more fully in Example 14, lessens the certainty of the barline and creates a more fluid prosody.

Example 1c.

156 *mf* stars are wide and a - live, they seem -

160 *mf* each like a smile of great sweet - ness,

"The stars are wide and alive . . . like a smile of great sweetness" mm. 156-162

Agee's use of the [aI] diphthong is found in the first two clauses of the sentence, extending its aural effect. Three of the words containing the diphthong are underscored differently, contributing to a beautiful lyric phrase. "Wide," m. 156, has agogic emphasis through the value [♩.] along with the reappearance of the rhythmic displacement of motive 12 (see Example 1b). "Alive," mm. 156-157, also set to motive 12, receives agogic emphasis with the [♩.] value. "Smile," m. 161, receives emphasis through several compositional means. The resolution of the repeated E-flat up by step is memorable for the listener; the length of the pitch [♩.] is

important in a 3/4 meter; and the rhythmic displacement of that length onto beat 2 in 3/4 is effective. Dynamic emphasis through the crescendo also strengthens the poetic device.

Example 2. Dissonance-Consonance:

"rousing and raising" m. 64

This rhyming device, which matches consonants instead of vowels, is strengthened through the repetition of rhythm within the bar [♪♪♪♪♪] on beats 1 and 3. The placement of the repetition at a higher pitch level and of dynamic accent through crescendo also maintains the poetic device.

Example 3a. Internal Rhyme:

do; its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed;

calmando

still ris-en, faints; halts;

75 *mp*

9

p

Vls.

"the iron whine rises on rising speed" mm. 76-77

Barber emphasizes the rhyming [aɪ] diphthong by putting each on an important beat of the measure in a steadily ascending melodic shape. Additionally, the ascending pitch promotes the poetic image. "Iron" is underscored by the interval of a tritone against the bass, a type of pitch accent.

Example 3b.

oh, re-mem-ber them kind-ly in their time of trou-ble;

22

23

f

210

f

Str.

"oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble" mm. 210-213

Two examples of internal rhyme are apparent in this line--the [ɛ m] sounds of "remember" and "them," and the [aɪ] diphthong of "kindly" and "time." Barber emphasizes both through agogic and metric accent. The [ɛ] vowel in the second syllable of "remember" has agogic emphasis [

Example 4a. Assonance:

rock - ing gen - tly and talk - ing gen - tly and watching the street and the

sempre legato

"rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street" mm. 9-10

This line of text is an extension and combination of imperfect rhyme (see Example 1a) with assonance. The device requires only a similarity of vowel sounds. The stressed vowel in "rocking" is pronounced [a], whereas that in "talking" is pronounced [ɔ]; "watching" may sound [a] or [ɔ]. As seen in Example 1a, the similarity of vowel sounds in "rocking" and "watching" is promoted through agogic and metric means. "Talking" has metric emphasis, falling on the seventh eighth note of a 12/8 bar. The pitch repetition within the melody creates a soothing effect against the motion of the bass line, as does the descending melodic contour.

Example 4b.

The musical score for Example 4b consists of four systems of music. The first system shows a vocal line with the lyrics "is the night one blue" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more complex melody in the right hand. The second system continues the vocal line with "dew," and the piano part. The third system includes the instruction "senza rit." and shows the vocal line with "Now is the night one blue dew, my" and the piano part. The piano part includes markings for "H-n." and "Ww., Harp". The fourth system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes markings for "Strs." and "sim.". The score is written in G major and 4/4 time.

"one blue dew." mm. 98-99, mm. 106-107

The resemblance of the sounds [u] and [ju] is strikingly emphasized in each statement. In the first appearance of this

monosyllabic sentence, the high pitch level of "blue," which is approached by the interval of a diminished fifth, resolves by half-step to "dew." Melodic shape, long note values, and a cessation of harmonic change within the measures all add expressiveness. In the second statement, mm. 106-107, the monosyllabic phrase serves as transition material; it is promoted with somewhat longer note values and a resolution up, which give a sense of forward motion. Both statements are distinguished by the *p* and *pp* levels which complement the slower harmonic motion, indicating the end of section B and the beginning of transition to section A'.

Example 5a. Alliteration:

The musical score for Example 5a is written in 12/8 time. The vocal line (treble clef) contains the lyrics: "stand - ing up in-to their sphere of pos - ses - sion of the trees, of birds' hung ha - vens, hang - ars." The lyrics are underlined to highlight the alliteration. The piano accompaniment (bass clef) features a steady eighth-note pattern. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *f*, and tempo markings like *r.spr.* and *Fl.*. The music is divided into measures, with measure numbers 12 and 13 indicated.

"birds' hung havens, hangars" mm. 12-13

Each [h] sound is promoted by a change in pitch, strengthening the poetic device. "Hung" has rhythmic accent, through its setting as a duplet in 12/8 meter. "Havens" receives metric accent, written on the downbeat of m. 13. "Hangars" has rhythmic accent through the syncopation of motive 5.

Example 5b.

9

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system features vocal parts for E.H., Cl., and B.n., along with piano accompaniment for Vr. The lyrics are "A street-car raising its iron". The second system features vocal parts for E.H. and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "moan; stop-ping;". The third system features vocal parts for Vls. and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "bell-ing and start-ing, ster - to-rous; rous - ing and rais - ing a -".

"A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; bell-ing and starting, stertorous" mm. 59-60

Barber's treatment of this poetic device uses metric, rhythmic, and pitch accent to underscore the four [st] sounds. "Streetcar," m. 59, has rhythmic emphasis, for the highest pitch of the measure, E-flat, is heard on beat two in the Common Time meter. The [st] sound also receives pitch emphasis, for the E-flat is an ascending diminished fourth from the preceding pitch. "Stopping," m. 61, has

metric and rhythmic emphasis. The [st] sounds fall on the downbeat of the bar and the word's syncopated rhythm [♪♪.] stands out against the even [♪♪] of the accompaniment. "Starting" has rhythmic emphasis, with its high pitch falling on the second beat of the bar.

"Stertorous," an unusual word which itself makes a harsh, gasping sound at the same time it suggests one, has the most distinctive treatment of the four. Rhythmic accent through syncopation after beat 3 plus the high pitch of the first syllable add expressiveness to the text. Barber additionally uses a type of emphasis through the repetition of a musical figure, the minor third, in the melody of measures 59, 62, and 63. "Streetcar," "starting," and "stertorous" each receive emphasis through the repetition.

Example 6. Repetition of Word:

The musical score for Example 6 shows a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics "win - dows and straw - seats on past - and past - and past,". The piano part includes a Piccolo (Picc.) and Woodwind (Ww.) section. Measure numbers 69 and 70 are indicated. Dynamics include "f" (forte) and "sf" (sforzando).

"on past and past and past" mm. 70-71

Barber intensifies the word repetition through a composite of rhythmic repetition [♪♪♪♪♪], pitch accent through the restatement of the dissonant c-sharp against the E-major eleventh chord in the accompaniment (which then resolves to d-sharp), and

agogic emphasis of the [d.] value for the final "past" of the sentence.

7a. Repetition of Phrase:

[16] 17

They are not talk-ing much, and the talk is qui - et, of noth-ing in par-

tic-u-lar, of noth-ing at all in par-

tic-u-lar, of noth-ing at all. The

senza Ped.

pp

mp casually

pp

mp

cresc.

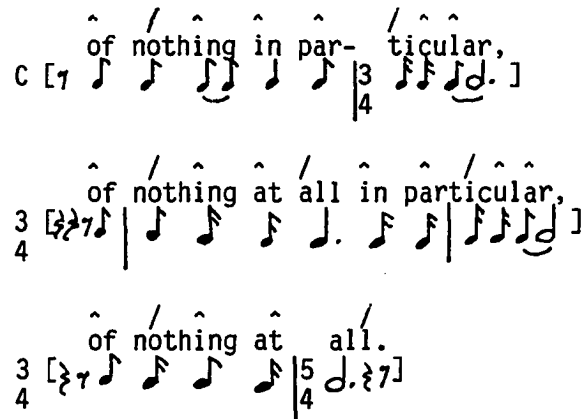
pp

149

153

"of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all." mm. 149-155.

Barber's subtle response to each of the three phrases is essentially a rhythmic variation, with agogic accents. The three phrases scan as follows:



The rhythmic treatment corresponds closely to the spoken speech rhythms; the metric scheme in use (3/4, C, 3/4) is similar to the metric scheme of measures 137-146--"On the rough wet grass of the back-yard," again with slight distinctions to accommodate the prosaic speech rhythms. The agogic accents serve different purposes in each phrase. In the first statement, the tied eighth of "nothing" occurs on the last half of beat two, in a descending melodic contour; the last syllable of "particular" has the longest duration in the phrase, but the descending pitch, falling on the second half of beat one again lessens its importance. In the second phrase, the added word "all" has the most emphasis, with its agogic accent of an [♩.] value. "Particular" has the same rhythmic scheme and pitch contour, adding symmetry to the phrase group. The third phrase, with its syncopated rhythm which begins on the second half of beat two, leads easily to

the most important word of the phrase, "all." Each phrase begins with an upbeat, another similarity generated by the speech rhythms.

Example 7b.

The musical score for Example 7b consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 243-245) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics "well be-lov - ed in that home: but will not, oh," with performance markings *p molto espr.* and *a tempo*. The piano accompaniment includes markings *mf*, *dim.*, and *p*. The second system (measures 246-250) continues the vocal line with "will not, not now, not ev - er; but" and includes markings *ff*, *allarg.*, and *pp*. The piano accompaniment includes markings *mf*, *f*, *ff*, and *allarg. Mn.*. The third system (measures 251-254) shows the vocal line with "will not ev - er tell me who I am." and includes markings *largamente* and *a tempo*. The piano accompaniment includes markings *largamente* and *p*. The score is numbered 243, 246, 251, and 254 at the beginning of each system.

"but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am." mm. 245-254

Barber calls into play a full range of compositional devices for this closing line. Each significant word receives agogic accent-- "not," m. 245, "now," m. 247, and "ever," m. 248. "Will" falls on the downbeat of bars 245, 246, and 251, a metric accent acting as a point of departure for ensuing phrases. Strong dynamic contrast through the use of levels from p to ff (mm. 245-250) is heard with a return to pp for the last clause of the sentence. Barber's realization of the closing text is distinguished by his use of silence to accentuate the text through contrast. In each bar, 245-248, the words already underscored as described above are heard alone in the midst of a thick, homophonic texture. The last line of the text repetition, mm. 250-251, is straightforward in its conception.

Example 8. Repetition of Construction:

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 12/8. The lyrics are: "Peo-ple go by; things go by. A horse, draw-ing a bug-gy,". The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand and a left hand. The right hand is in treble clef and the left hand is in bass clef. Both hands have a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 12/8. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. A marking "16" is visible in the left hand of the piano part.

"People go by: things go by." m. 16

Barber uses this simple construction to strong advantage.

The two lines of the text follow:

12 ^ ^ ^ / ^ / ^ / ^
 It has become that time of evening
 8 [♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪]

 / ^ ^ / / ^ /
 People go by; things go by.
 8 [♪ ♪ ♪ ♪. ♪ ♪ ♪.]

Significantly, the composer maintains Agee's clause construction by altering the first melody for "it has become that time of evening" into two parallel units, each half as long as the more continuous first statement.

Example 9. Repetition of Clause:

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of seven systems of staves. The vocal line is in the upper staff of each system, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical markings such as *p a tempo*, *pp*, *cresc.*, *Str.*, *mf*, *Tutti*, and *f*. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff.

sleep - ing birds. One is an art - ist, he is
 liv - ing at home. One is a mu - si - cian, she is
 liv - ing at home. One is my moth - er who is
 good to me. One is my fa - ther who is
 good to me.

Measure numbers 172, 175, 177, 179, and 191 are indicated at the beginning of their respective systems.

"One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me." mm. 174-182.

Several factors are apparent. In this repetition of construction, the composer uses motive 12 for the first two statements, varies it slightly for the third statement--"One is my mother,"--and then returns to motive 12 for the last statement of this parallel construction. The motive appears in symmetric, two-measure phrases, with metric expansion for emphasis. The second phrase, "One is a musician" is written with 3/4 and Common Time signatures; "One is my mother" is notated in 3/4 and 5/4 bars. The last, "One is my father" returns to the original 3/4 meter but the phrase becomes three successive 3/4 bars. Within the expanded metric scheme, Barber is able to underscore significant words by agogic or rhythmic accents. The rhythmic treatment of the first half of each sentence is the same for phrases one, two, and four. The third phrase "One is my mother" uses a rhythmic variation of [♪♪♪♪ ♪♪♪] to emphasize the word "mother." The second half of each sentence benefits the most from the expanding metric scheme. "Home" (m. 175) [♪] becomes [♪.] in measure 177; "me" (m. 179) [♪.] remains [♪.] in measure 182. A sense of establishment, departure, and return of melodic materials is achieved through these subtle changes.

Example 10a. Onomatopoeia:

gain its iron in-creas-ing moan

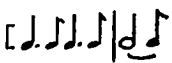
and swim-ming its gold -

win-dows and straw-seats on past and past -

and past, the bleak spark crack-ling and curs-ing a -

boye it like a small mal-ig-nant spir-it set to dog its tracks;

"its iron increasing moan . . . on past and past and past . . .
 the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant
 spirit set to dog its tracks" mm. 65-75

Excerpts from this long and complex sentence have already been discussed as examples of dissonance-consonance (Example 2), internal rhyme (Example 3a), and repetition of word (Example 6). The poetic device indicates imitation of a sound through word choice. The three fragments of the sentence in Example 10a illustrate three examples of poetic onomatopoeia and three different musical responses in Barber's score. The first fragment under discussion, "its iron increasing moan," mm. 65-67, is an example of agogic accent; the length  and the pitch changes of "moan" imitate the effect of the streetcar's approach. "On past and past and past," mm. 70-71, with the repeated [st] sounds suggests the sound of sparks on the tracks; again, the longer note values for each "past" allow the singer time to clearly produce and emphasize each [st]. The last fragment, "the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks" is a series of expressive sounds in rapid succession: [b], [k], [sp], [g], [d], [t], [sm], [sp], [ts], [t], and [sks]. The series imitates the metallic noise of the sparks of wheels against the streetcar tracks. Motivic restatement bolsters the illustration as well. Barber uses the "chromatic link" motive 10; the rapid rate of pitch change in motive 10 complements the agitation of the language. Using a familiar motive imposes a musical unification on the text; a different melody would make the singer's task more difficult. Additionally, metric emphasis accentuates the important syllables of "crackling," "above," and "malignant," which occur on third or first beats of the Common Time meter. Rhythmic emphasis through syncopation emphasizes "spirit" and "set." The

composer's careful articulation markings of staccati and accent as well as the dynamic changes further shape the phrase.

Example 10b.

noise of the lo-custs - from all the air at once en -

chants my ear - drums.

121 122 123

Ww. Strs.

dim. pp espr.

"noise of the locusts. . . at once enchants my eardrums."
mm. 121-123

The string of [z], [sts], [ts], and [z] sounds imitate the locusts' rasping buzz. Pitch organization is skillfully handled; Barber uses a limited pitch range for the melody in measure 121, which reproduces the monotonous, low-pitched locust sounds, and motive 5 for the melody in measure 122, as a unification device to end section A'. Metric emphasis underscores significant syllables of "noise," "once," and "enchants," each falling on the first or the seventh eighth of the 12/8 and 15/8 bars. Rhythmic accentuation through an unexpected beat

division emphasizes "locusts" [$\overset{2}{\text{f}}\overset{2}{\text{f}}$] and "-chants my" [$\overset{2}{\text{f}}\overset{2}{\text{f}}$] "eardrums" [$\overset{2}{\text{f}}\overset{2}{\text{f}}\overset{2}{\text{f}}$], once more underscoring the sibilant consonants. The [$\overset{2}{\text{f}}\text{d}$] value on the second syllable of "eardrums" gives agogic accent to the final, voiced consonant to end the sentence in a treatment consistent with bars 121-122.

BARBER'S RESPONSE TO IMPLIED RHYTHM WITHIN THE TEXT

As discussed earlier, the words of James Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" imply a pattern of spoken rhythms all their own. The precise dimensions of Samuel Barber's musical response to these rhythms in composing his own Knoxville: Summer of 1915 form the subject of the last facet of the present analysis. What is in question are rhythms generated by spoken word rhythms, rhythm resulting from word repetition and punctuation, rhythm created by one-syllable words and their punctuation, rhythm established by one-syllable words, rhythmic treatment of two-syllable words, and syllabic and melismatic text-setting. Examples and analyses follow.

Example 11. Rhythm generated through spoken word rhythms:

The musical score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 8/8. The score is divided into four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

System 1: The vocal line begins with a *p* (piano) marking. The lyrics are "It has be-come that time of eve-ning when peo-ple sit on their porch-es,". The piano accompaniment starts with a *p* marking and a 7-measure rest.

System 2: The vocal line continues with "rock - ing gen - tly and talk - ing gen - tly and watching the street and the". The piano accompaniment includes the marking *sempre legato* and a 9-measure rest.

System 3: The vocal line continues with "stand - ing up in-to their sphere of pos - ses - sion — of the trees, of birds' hung". The piano accompaniment includes the marking *espr.* (espressivo) and a 11-measure rest.

System 4: The vocal line continues with "ha - vers, — hang - ars, —". The piano accompaniment includes the marking *Fl.* (Forte) and a 13-measure rest. A bracketed number [2] is placed above the vocal line in the final measure of this system.

Spoken Word Rhythms

^ ^ ^ / ^ / ^ / ^ ^ / ^ / ^ ^ / ^
 It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches,
 / ^ / ^ ^ / ^ / ^ ^ / ^ ^ / ^ ^
 rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the
 / ^ / / ^ ^ / ^ ^ / ^ ^ ^ / ^ /
 standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds'
 / / ^ / ^
 hung havens, hangars.

Reciting aloud this portion of Agee's text reveals a high degree of similarity between the spoken rhythms and the musical realization. The composer uses several means to accomplish this. In measures 7-14, Barber writes a melody of a limited pitch range which combines pitch repetition with the motion of an interval of a fourth (see Figure 1, motives 4 and 5). Pitch repetition is used a great deal, particularly the C-sharp to smooth over certain syllables--"has become that" (m. 7) and "rocking gently and talking" (m. 9). Key syllables fall on the important subdivisions in 12/8, that is the fourth, seventh, and tenth eighth notes of the bar; these syllables also receive agogic accents, such as "become," "time," "rocking," and "talking." The combinations of compound meters 12/8, 9/8, and 6/8 maintain a smoothly flowing melodic setting of the text.

Example 12. Rhythm as a result of word repetition and punctuation:

9

E.H. Cl. A street-car raising its iron

moan; stop-ping;

bell-ing and start-ing, ster-to-rous; rous-ing and rais-ing a-

gain its iron in-creas-ing moan

staccato

Vis.

8

Barber's selection of text gave him numerous opportunities to deal with poetic devices such as repetition, as well as with Agee's unusual punctuation. In measures 59-65, an interesting example of Barber's response to both repetition of construction and idiosyncratic punctuation is found at the start of section B, in the description of the streetcar--"A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting, stertorous; rousing and raising again." Once more Agee repeats words, but here he liberally uses punctuation to suggest the forceful jerk and sound of the streetcar. Barber uses several types of emphasis to complement the string of verbs. Most receive a slightly varied treatment of rhythm or pitch or both. Five of the six verbs fall on the first or third beat of the bar in Common Time, as metric emphasis. One obvious exception is Barber's setting of the word "stopping" which has a distinct rhythmic treatment, but is on a lower pitch level. As if to illustrate Agee's unexpected semicolon, Barber follows the word in his own composition with two beats of rest. "Stopping" also receives pitch emphasis; the resolution of the half-step occurs a half-beat before the resolution of the orchestral doubling. The composer's use of the interval of a major or minor third in bars 59-63 provides additional musical emphasis. The melody's repeated descending intervals of a third ("streetcar raising" m. 59, "belling and starting, stertorous" mm. 62-63) emphasize the words through the repetition of a musical figure.

Barber treats two of the three semicolons and their following phrases with some type of pause; the exception is heard in bars 60-61--"moan; stopping." Here the composer relies more heavily on the

contrast of the sustained vowel sound [o] with the explosive sound combination of [st] to express the text. The comma before "stertorous" is treated with an eighth rest; this unusual word, discussed in Chapter II, receives rhythmic emphasis through syncopation. The spoken rhythm of the phrase is:

/ ^ ^ / ^ / ^ ^
 bell-ing and start-ing, stertorous

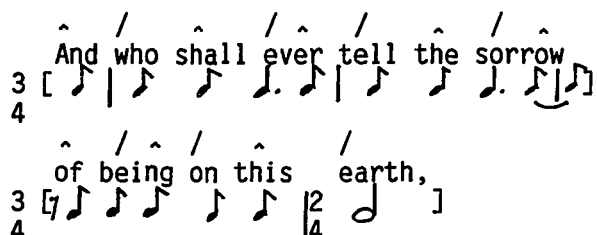
The composer writes this corresponding rhythmic pattern:

/ ^ ^ / ^ / ^ ^
 bell-ing and start-ing, stertorous
 C [♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪]

Example 13. Rhythm as a result of one-syllable words and their punctuation:

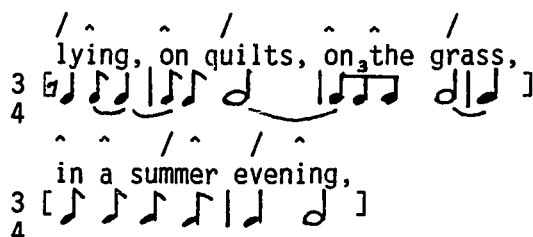
The musical score consists of five systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1 (Measures 185-188):**
 - Vocal: *f* By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; — and *mf*
 - Piano: Measure 185 is marked *p*. The accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line.
- System 2 (Measures 189-191):**
 - Vocal: who shall ev er tell the sor row — of be - ing on this
 - Piano: Measure 189 is marked *p*. Measure 190 has a *Ww.* (woodwind) entry. Measure 191 has a *trsc.* (trumpet) entry. The piano part has a sustained harmonic accompaniment.
- System 3 (Measures 192-194):**
 - Vocal: earth, ly - ing, on quilts,
 - Piano: Measure 192 is marked *p*. Measure 193 has a *Str.* (string) entry. Measure 194 has a *marcato* marking. The piano part has a rhythmic accompaniment.
- System 4 (Measures 195-197):**
 - Vocal: — on the grass, in a sum - mer eve - ning,
 - Piano: Measure 195 is marked *p*. Measure 196 has a *mf* marking. The piano part has a rhythmic accompaniment.
- System 5 (Measures 198-200):**
 - Vocal: a-mong the sounds of the night.
 - Piano: Measure 198 is marked *dim.* (diminuendo). Measure 199 has a *mp* marking. Measure 200 has a *p* marking and an *allarg.* (allargando) marking. The piano part has a rhythmic accompaniment.



The musical phrase moves through the two-syllable words to the monosyllabic phrase "on this earth," underscoring Agee's sense of his family's mortality. Barber maintains the significance of meaning as well as the rhythm of "earth" through agogic and metric emphasis within the phrase. The change of time signature from 3/4 to 2/4 in bar 192 allows two full beats to pronounce "earth." The more continuous melodic phrase corresponds to the lack of punctuation in the text.

Measures 193-197 make up a five-bar, asymmetric phrase. The word rhythm is again scrupulously honored:



These two lines of text also contain only three two-syllable words. The singer usually breathes after "grass," making a three-bar plus two-bar phrase. The words "quilts" and "grass" receive the same manner of agogic and metric emphasis given to significant one-syllable words in the first two phrases. In this instance, the composer uses melodic syncopation which complements the punctuation and moves the phrase forward to "on the grass."

Example 14. Rhythm established through one-syllable words:

[14] Allegretto $\text{♩} = 80$

a tempo *Cl. espr.*

128 *p*

[19] *p very*
On the
muted Stra.

mf *p*

simply
rough wet grass of the back-yard my fa-ther and moth-er have spread

138

mp
quilt. We all lie there, my moth-er, my fa-ther, my un-cle, my


141 *mp*


p
aunt, and I too am ly-ing there.


144 *p* *pizz.* *pp*


The musical score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 80 beats per minute. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 128, 138, 141, and 144 indicated. Performance markings include 'a tempo', 'Cl. espr.', 'p' (piano), 'mf' (mezzo-forte), 'mp' (mezzo-piano), 'pp' (pianissimo), and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The lyrics are: 'On the rough wet grass of the back-yard my fa-ther and moth-er have spread quilt. We all lie there, my moth-er, my fa-ther, my un-cle, my aunt, and I too am ly-ing there.'

As seen in Example 13, one-syllable words shape phrases in section C of Knoxville. During the opening measures of section C, one-syllable words prompt a multi- or mixed-metric response from the composer as well. Several metric schemes are in place during measures 137-139:

Spoken text: $\frac{3}{4}$  $\frac{7}{8}$ $\frac{3}{8}$

Time signature: $\frac{3}{4}$  $\frac{7}{8}$

Inner voices: $\frac{2}{4}$  $\frac{2}{4}$

Implied in bass: $\frac{6}{8}$  $\frac{6}{8}$

On the | rough wet grass of | the back-yard

Example 1b above mentioned the eighth note displacement and alteration of motive 12 from its original appearance in bar 130. The composer has already made one adjustment of motive to text to preserve text rhythms. A feeling of 6/8 is produced by the falling eighth notes in the bass line in measures 130-134 and 137-139. In measure 136, immediately prior to the first vocal entrance of section C, all voices appear to re-establish the meter of 3/4. At this point, the descending eighth-note bass pattern begins again, but it is displaced by one eighth note from the downbeats of bars 138-140. During the first words of text, the eighth note displacement of motive 12 allows the meter of the melody to be affected by that of the bass, creating an ambiguity between the notated 3/4 and the implied 6/8 meter. Within the implied 6/8, metric stress occurs on the unimportant words

"the" (m. 137) and "of"; on the other hand, the stressed words "rough" and "back" appear on unaccented pulses. However, in the notated 3/4, the stressed word "rough" has appropriate metric stress, falling on a downbeat, but the article "the" also receives unexpected metric emphasis, heard on the downbeat on bar 139. In either the implied 6/8 or the notated 3/4 meters, the composer's displacement and alteration of motive 12 to accommodate the prosody of a string of one-syllable words creates metric ambiguity.

Two other elements, however, help the performer negotiate the metric ambiguity. Barber places a tenuto mark over the syllable of "back-yard," supplying more rhythmic emphasis within the notated 3/4 meter. And, immediately prior to measure 139, the atypical and awkward prosody is smoothed through the metric organization of the inner voices as well. In bars 138-139, the inner voices are organized in a 2/4 metric scheme. Thus "rough" is heard as the first eighth note in 2/4 and "the" is heard as the third eighth note in 2/4, which strengthens the notated 3/4 metric organization. In some way, almost every eighth note in these measures is accentuated.

Example 15. Rhythmic treatment of two-syllable words:

The musical score for Example 15 is presented in three systems. The top system is the vocal line, written in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The lyrics are: "with voices gentle and meaning-less like the voices of sleep-ing birds." The middle system is the piano accompaniment, featuring a flute (Fl.) and a piano (p) section. The piano part includes a piano (p) section. The score shows the placement of notes and rests for each syllable, illustrating the metric ambiguity discussed in the text.

Barber's treatment of the many two-syllable words of the text is attentive; appropriate word stress appears in the melodies of his work. Example 15 contains three instances of Barber's careful prosody. In measures 169-172, four of the five two-syllable words are realized with musical rhythms that correspond to the word stress. Barber uses a variety of ways to lengthen the first syllable of "voices" (m. 169), "gentle" (m. 169), and "sleeping" (m. 172). "Voices" in bar 169 receives an agogic accent; "gentle" in the same measure is realized with the longest value on the first syllable of the word; the first syllable of "sleeping" in bar 172 receives metric accent. A few examples of inappropriate stress may result from the statement of a motive which overrides the textual stress, such as "like the voices," measure 171, in which the unstressed syllable of the word has the longer value. This motive contains the all-important interval of the fourth in Knoxville; a sensitive performer can simply under-emphasize the unstressed syllable, and the passage becomes workable.

Example 16a. Melismatic text-setting:

The musical score for Example 16a is presented in three systems. The top system shows a vocal line with the lyrics "gain its iron in-creas-ing moan". The middle system shows the piano accompaniment, which includes a section marked "Ob." (Oboe) and "Strs. pizz." (Strings, pizzicato). The bottom system shows the continuation of the piano accompaniment. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Example 16b.

The musical score for Example 16b consists of two staves. The top staff is for the voice, written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody is characterized by a high density of notes, with many eighth and sixteenth notes beamed together, creating a rapid, syllabic flow. The lyrics "Sleep, soft smi-ling, draws me un-to her:" are aligned with the notes. The bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, written in bass clef with the same key signature. The left hand plays a steady eighth-note pattern, while the right hand has a more complex, flowing line. The score is marked with "p dolce" and the number "236".

One of the great challenges of Knoxville for the performer, beyond the varied and expressive vocabulary, is the sheer number of syllables which must be successfully communicated to the listener. Barber, already conscious of structural considerations and dramatic unity, chose to set the great majority of all these words syllabically with one pitch per syllable. The few melismas using more than one pitch per syllable of text which Barber incorporated are most often used for illustrative purposes, such as "iron increasing moan," measures 66-67, or "Sleep, soft, smiling, draws me unto her," measures 236-238.

This analysis and discussion of the correspondences of Agee's text to Barber's music has centered around two issues of the complicated relationship of the text to music: Barber's structural response to the Agee text, and Barber's melodic response to specific aspects of the Agee text. These issues are important for the understanding and intelligent performance of the composition. Chapter IV presents a survey of critic's responses to the Barber composition and summarizes conclusions drawn from the present study about the relationship of text to music in Samuel Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915.

Chapter IV

SUMMARY

Valuable insights into musical compositions can be gained from careful review of the criticism which followed early performances and recordings. The critical response to Samuel Barber's musical realization of Knoxville: Summer of 1915 was generally positive as can be seen in Don Hennessee's detailed and thorough analysis of critical response, published several years ago. In the present study, critical reviews and remarks were analyzed for their commentary upon the relationship of text and music in Barber's work.

Critical enthusiasm is apparent in these two comments published soon after the work's first performances:

It is an extended work, beautifully made as only very few composers know how, of the most refreshing simplicity and intellectual honesty all too rare in American music of the past three decades . . . Barber's feeling for the words to be sung is simply splendid.¹

So Koussevitzky, Miss Steber and the Boston Symphony . . . gave Knoxville: Summer of 1915 a beautiful, compelling performance . . . The music Barber wrote is modern, but ridden with melody and perceptive of the mood Agee created.²

¹Don A. Hennessee, Samuel Barber: A Bio-Bibliography (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 226, citing David Diamond, "Samuel Barber," Notes 7 (March 1950): 309-310.

²*Ibid.*, 232-233, citing Newsweek 31 (April 19, 1948): 84-85.

Later critical commentary also included praise:

Knoxville was composed during a period in which Barber was obviously trying on new styles and techniques. . . . [it] is a technical tour de force in that it has mastered the prosodic eccentricities and complexities of its text, and, further, has done so within an immaculately clear formal structure.³

The music in the prose, there is nothing to 'complete.' Yet Barber, drawing on his melodic gift, evokes the right sense of innocence and earthly effulgence.⁴

One critic goes so far as to use Knoxville to answer a familiar hypothetical question:

Were I asked about the desert island and the phonograph, as the question might pertain to American music, Samuel Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915 would surely qualify for my luggage. I've always found this to be the single work that cuts beneath the veneer of coolness and occasional superciliousness that characterizes Barber's neo-Romanticism. The piece is beautifully made, meltingly lyrical and has remained poignant over the fifteen years since its composition.⁵

While not every critic liked the work, those who did generally agreed on several points. Barber's work is perceived as well-crafted, melodious, and expressive in a manner which heightens perception of the text. These reactions suggest the great skill of the composer's response to the text.

Close analysis shows Barber responded to Agee's poetic devices both structurally and melodically, and his choices of suitable sections

³Ibid., 227, citing William Flanagan, "Classical: Samuel Barber's Best--Knoxville: Summer of 1915," Stereo Review 22 (June 1969): 76-77.

⁴Ibid., 232, citing Daniel Schillaci, "For the Record," New West 6 (April 1981): 118.

⁵Ibid., 227, citing William Flanagan, "Classics," HiFi/Stereo Review 9 (August 1962): 59.

of Agee's experimental prose-poem to set reflect his musical judgment. An accomplished composer, Barber was sensitive to the general requirements for the musical realization of any text. But here the composer's editing balanced the writer's nostalgia with the structural demands of musical composition. By omitting the long opening descriptions of the Knoxville neighborhood, Barber begins his musical realization with "it has become that time of evening," and a sequence of activities is described. Barber's organizational approach--the use of different types of harmonic language for each section, a motivic organization using thirteen musical ideas which are recalled within and between sections, and the occasional opposition of linear texture to the prevailing homophonic texture--both underscores the shifts of narrative and changes of activity in the recollection, and unifies the recollection within a five-part rondo structure. The result, a lengthy, continuous twentieth-century work for solo voice and orchestra, is unified through its clear, economic structure and tonal organization.

The composer's structural use of motivic material helps to articulate the five-part rondo form. Motives 1-6 are heard in section A, A', C, and A", providing unity through melodic recall. Motives 7-11 appear only in section B, providing the contrast necessary to describe the streetcar. Motives 12-13 are heard in section C, when the narrative shifts from third- to first-person, providing new, yet familiar motivic material. Some of the motives are alike in intervallic contour--motives 1-4, 6, 12-13; some additionally share

emphasis on the interval of the fourth within the motive--motives 1-3, 5, 9, and 12. Both the recall and the similarity of intervallic contour of motives within Barber's Knoxville provide unity for the text.

Barber's structural response to Agee's extensive and unconventional use of punctuation is most evident in section B. Here Agee's long sentence describing the streetcar prompts Barber to supply contrast through harmonic language, new motivic ideas, and change of texture. The effects of the rapidly changing images of the sentence and its punctuation are heightened by a different, chromatic harmonic language and the combination of motives 7-11 in a linear fashion.

The one-syllable words of Agee's "Knoxville" serve as additional structural tools for Barber. The composer set monosyllabic words musically just as Agee used them poetically--to segment sections of the prose within the text and to add a sense of finality to the work. Responding to a change in the text's own rhythm brought about by its one-syllable words, Barber created clear divisions within a rondo form. Structurally, Barber emphasizes one-syllable words in a number of ways including longer note values, ascending melodic shapes, and slower rates of harmonic change within sections using one-syllable words.

Barber's melodic response also closely adheres to Agee's techniques. A majority of the twenty-four examples of Barber's response to poetic devices of sound and to implied rhythms within the text show the composer's use of standard compositional means--agodic,

dynamic, metric, pitch, or rhythmic emphasis. Usually, the composer promotes the poetic device through a combination of means. Analysis of the examples shows that fifteen receive agogic emphasis, four receive dynamic emphasis, and thirteen receive metric emphasis. Pitch accentuation is apparent in five of the examples; rhythmic emphasis is significant in eleven examples.

The composer's strong use of agogic, metric, and rhythmic emphasis illustrates his awareness of the spoken text rhythms behind the poetic devices and in the text as a whole. Barber's agogic and metric accents reflect a traditional orientation: emphasis through the established meter of a passage or emphasis through duration are standard compositional practice. Barber's choice of rhythmic emphasis reflects his ability to provide emphasis for the text by contrast within the established metrical scheme.

Most of Barber's use of pitch accent for these poetic devices of sound are found in Section B. The text, which describes the streetcar's approach through the neighborhood, is characterized by rapidly changing descriptive images. Here pitch accents complement the linear texture and the higher amount of dissonance Barber uses to realize the text. The lesser use of dynamic accent for the devices under consideration indicates Barber's use of dynamic accent is reserved only for specific expressive effects.

As a Neo-Romantic twentieth-century composer working within a traditional format, Barber was at times limited in his compositions to firmly established, conventional practice. Through careful attention

to word rhythms and a deliberate artistic response to Agee's sophisticated writing techniques, Barber was free to realize the unorthodox, yet appealing text of the prose-poem, in an expressive, lyric style.

In the Foreword to Agee's Permit Me Voyage, the book of poetry published in 1934 as that year's Yale Series of Younger Poets selection, Archibald MacLeish writes:

It is for this reason that I find Agee's first book of more interest than any first book of poems I have seen for a long time. . . . The whole emphasis is upon the work. And the work shows it. What appears is a technical apprenticeship successfully passed, a mature and in some cases a masterly control of rhythms, a vocabulary at once personal to the poet and appropriate to the intention and, above everything else, the one poetic gift which no amount of application can fake--a delicate and perceptive ear.⁶

Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," written less than four years after the appearance of Permit Me Voyage, certainly displays Agee's love of "the work" as well as his gift for heightened poetic expression. A later source, which contains both summary and praise of Agee's contributions to American literature, comments on the writer's originality:

The most original mind in modern American poetry since the thirties goes practically unheeded--James Agee. Strictly speaking, he has only published one small volume of poems, the scarce little book, "Permit Me Voyage." . . .
. . . some say the poets have channeled their energies into prose, that prose is the national idiom. This theory tells where the poetry has gone but it does not tell why. . . .

Maybe prose has absorbed the poets then. Yet another way to look at it is to see the poetry which is emerging from our prose. . . . It could be a poetry that combined for the best of the lyric and the narrative. . . .

⁶James Agee, Permit Me Voyage, with a Foreword by Archibald MacLeish (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 6-7.

You may say that Agee's language is sometimes not modern or that he tends to forsake his subject for his personal feeling. . . .

What does it matter that this poetry is written in what is technically called prose? It works like poetry. . . . Poetry in the final analysis is something⁷ that happens in our mind, an event if you want to call it that.

These polished, positive statements about Agee, his writings, and his contribution to American literature endorsed his efforts to create a heightened form of literary expression. Samuel Barber was a skilled composer with a keen sense of literary values. It was natural for him to be interested in methods of heightened lyric expression, wherever he found them. Barber's work, faithful to a high degree to the content and structure of the Agee text, serves both mood and detail in its conception, and successfully creates a powerful musical memory. His ability to write lyrically within a clear structure resulted in a poignant, accessible work, rewarding for performer and audience alike. As Hennessee wrote in 1985:

Barber's style is characterized by a romantic lyricism. . . . Three years after his death his music still appears frequently on programs from coast to coast and abroad. His secret? Perhaps it is a very simple one: to the average concert-goer, his music is listenable, it has beauty and can be understood. We can still be moved by Knoxville, Summer of 1915, and probably Samuel Barber would ask no more than that.⁸

⁷Wallace Kaufmann, "Our Unacknowledged Poetry: An Essay on James Agee," Agenda 4 (Summer 1966): 68-75.

⁸Hennessee, Bio-Bibliography, 12.

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APPENDIX A
TEXT AS APPEARING IN PARTISAN REVIEW

APPENDIX A

Text as appearing in Partisan Review, August-September, 1938.

[sic] indicates misprints in original text.

Bold type shows text later set to music by Samuel Barber.

Knoxville: Summer of 1915
James Agee

We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville Tennessee in the time that I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child. It was a little bit mixed sort of block, fairly solidly lower middle class, with one or two juts apiece on either side of that. The houses corresponded: middlesized gracefully fretted wood houses built in the late nineties and early nineteen hundreds, with small front and side and more spacious side yards, and trees in the yards, and porches. These were softwooded trees, poplars, tulip trees, cottonwoods. There were fences around one or two of the houses, but mainly the yards ran into each other with only now and then a low hedge that wasn't doing very well. There were few good friends among the grown people, and they were not poor enough for the other sort of intimate acquaintance, but everyone nodded and spoke, and even might talk short times, trivially, and at the two extremes of the general or the particular, and ordinarily next door neighbors talked quite a bit when they happened to run into each other, and never paid calls. The men were mostly small businessmen, one or two very modestly executives, one or two worked with their hands, most of them clerical, and most of them between thirty [sic] and fortyfive.

But it is of these evenings, I speak.

Supper was at six and was over by half past. There was still daylight, shining softly and with a tarnish, like the lining of a shell; and the carbon lamps lifted at the corners were on the light, and the locusts were started, and the fire flies were out, and a few frogs were flopping in the dewy grass, by the time the fathers and the children came out. The children ran out first hell bent and yelling those names by which they were known; then the fathers sank out leisurely in crossed suspenders, their collars removed and their necks looking tall and shy. The mothers stayed back in the kitchen washing and drying, putting things away, recrossing their traceless footsteps like the lifetime journeys of bees, measuring out the dry cocoa for breakfast. When they came out they had taken off their aprons and

their skirts were dampened and they sat in rockers on their porches quietly.

It is not of the games children play in the evening that I want to speak now, it is of a contemporaneous atmosphere that has little to do with them: that of the fathers of families, each in his space of lawn, his shirt fishlike pale in the unnatural light and his face nearly anonymous, hosing their lawns. The hoses were attached at spigots that stood out of the brick foundations of the houses. The nozzles were variously set but usually so there was a long sweet stream of spray, the nozzle wet in the hand, the water trickling the right forearm and the peeled-back cuff, and the water whishing out a long loose and low-curved cone, and so gentle a sound. First an insane noise of violence in the nozzle, then the still irregular sound of adjustment, then the smoothing into steadiness and a pitch as accurately tuned to the size and style of stream as any violin. So many qualities of sound out of one hose: so many choral differences out of those several hoses that were in earshot. Out of any one hose, the almost dead silence of the release, and the short still arch of the separate big drops, silent as a held breath, and the only noise the flattering noise on leaves and the slapped grass at the fall of each big drop. That, and the intense hiss with the intense stream; that, and that same intensity not growing less but growing more quiet and delicate with the turn of the nozzle, up to that extreme tender whisper when the water was just a wide bell of film. Chiefly, though, the hoses were set much alike, in a compromise between distance and tenderness of spray, (and quite surely a sense of art behind this compromise, and a quiet, deep joy, too real to recognize itself), and the sounds therefore were pitched much alike; pointed by the snorting start of a new hose; decorated by some man playful with the nozzle; left empty, like God by the sparrow's fall, when any single one of them desists: and all, though near alike, of various pitch; and in this unison. These sweet pale streamings in the light lift out their pallors and their voices all together, mothers hushing their children, the hushing unnaturally prolonged, the men gentle and silent and each snail-like withdrawn into the quietude of what he singly is doing, the urination of huge children stood loosely military against an invisible wall, and gently happy and peaceful, tasting the mean goodness of their living like the last of their suppers in their mouths; while the locusts carry on this noise of hoses on their much higher and sharper key. The noise of the locust is dry, and it seems not to be rasped or vibrated but urged from him as if through a small orifice by a breath that can never give out. Also there is never one locust but an illusion of at least a thousand. The noise of each locust is pitched in some classic locust range out of which none of them varies more than two full tones; and yet you seem to hear each locust discrete from all the rest, and there is a long, slow, pulse in their noise, like the scarcely defined arch of a long and high set bridge. They are all around in every tree, so that the noise seems to come from nowhere and everywhere at once, from the whole shell heaven,

shivering in your flesh and teasing your eardrums, the boldest of all the sounds of the night. And yet it is habitual to summer nights, and is of the great order of noises, like the noises of the sea and of the blood her precocious grandchild, which you realize you are hearing only when you catch yourself listening. Meantime from low in the dark, just outside the swaying horizons of the hoses, conveying always grass in the damp of dew and its strong green-black smear of smell, the regular yet spaced noises of the crickets, each a sweet cold silver noise threenoted, like the slipping each time of three matched links of a small chain.

But the men by now, one by one, have silenced their hoses and drained and coiled them. Now only two, and now only one, is left, and you see only ghostlike shirt with sleeve garters, and sober mystery of hi [sic] mild face like the lifted face of large cattle inquiring of your presence in a pitchdark pool of meadow; and now he too is gone; and it has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds [sic] hung havens, hangars. People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt: a loud auto: a quiet auto: people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard and starched milk; the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber. A street car raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting, stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting, lifts, faints forgone: forgotten. Now is the night one blue dew.

Now is the night one blue due, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose.

Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes.

Content, silver, like peeps of light, each cricket makes his comment over and over in the drowned grass.

A cold toad thumpily flounders.

Within the edges of damp shadows of side yards are hovering children nearly sick with joy of fear, who watch the unguarding of a telephone pole.

Around white carbon corner lamps bugs of all sizes lifted elliptic, solar systems. Big shells bruise themselves, assailant: he is fallen on his back, legs squiggling.

Parents on porches: rock and rock. From damp strings morning glories: hang their ancient faces.

The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums.

On the rough wet grass of the back yard my father and mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there. First we were sitting up, then one of us lay down, and then we all lay down, on our stomachs, or on our sides, or on our backs, and they have kept on talking. They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all. The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine, quiet, with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.

After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

APPENDIX B

AGEE PROSE AS SET TO MUSIC BY SAMUEL BARBER

APPENDIX B

Agee prose as set to music by Samuel Barber and as appears in the G. Schirmer, Inc. performing edition.

We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville Tennessee in the time that I had lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child.

. . . It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds' hung havens, hangars. People go by: things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt: a loud auto: a quiet auto: people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard, and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber. A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting, stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting, lifts, faints foregone: forgotten. Now is the night one blue dew.

Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose.
Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes. . .
Parents on porches: rock and rock. From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient faces.
The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums.

On the rough wet grass of the back yard my father and mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there. . . They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all. The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine, . . . with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One

is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.

After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

APPENDIX C
AGEE TEXTS FOR SOLO VOCAL PERFORMANCE

APPENDIX C

Agee texts for solo vocal performance.¹

Barber, Samuel. "Sure on this shining night" from Four Songs for Voice and Piano, Opus 13, no. 3. New York: G. Schirmer, 1941.

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¹For a list of Agee text-settings available in choral as well as solo vocal repertory, the reader is referred to: Michael Hovland, comp. Musical Setting of American Poetry (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 3-5.

THE PUTNAM & GROSSET BOOK GROUP

August 13, 1990

Dr. Jane K. Dressler
502 Rellim Drive
Kent, Ohio 44240

Dear Dr. Dressler:

We are glad to grant you gratis permission to use excerpts from James Agee's Knoxville: Summer of 1915 in your article to be published in the September/October issue of The NATS Journal under the title "The 'Word Music' of James Agee: Samuel Barber's Melodic Response".


In the article you have mentioned that Knoxville: Summer of 1915 appeared in A DEATH IN THE FAMILY, and that seems to be sufficient credit. However, when I grant reprint permission I usually require that the following credit line be carried:

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August 6, 1990

Jane K. Dressler
502 Rellim Drive
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Dear Ms. Dressler:

I very much regret that your letter of June 1
was misplaced, hence this belated reply.

You have my permission to include James Agee's
"Knoxville: Summer 1915" in microfilm copies
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As trustee, I am aware of the fact that UMI may
supply (sell?) single copies on demand, per the
firm's letter to you.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Newman -
Mary Newman, Trustee
The James Agee Trust